

THE HINGES

OF

CUSTOM

IN

EDNAH AIKEN

THE HINGES OF CUSTOM

BY
EDNAH AIKEN ✓



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TO H. L.

We want to hear her voice; we know it will be golden;
We trust her truth; we love her silent searching;
Perhaps she has been speaking—ourselves that do not hear!

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THE HINGES OF CUSTOM

CHAPTER I

THE PENDULUM

NASTY stop, that! Sudden halt in the tube between stations, guards running forward, and then everything quiet. Everybody pretending to be interested in his paper; and not knowing if it's a fire in the tube! That's your British crowd; self-conscious; afraid to seem afraid. Sitting quite still, all of them, and everybody's mind running ahead with the guards, to find what the deuce it's all about—

All London huddling towards its night-rest; seven millions of 'em going home, or getting ready for someone who is going home. Crawling into tubes, or climbing into 'busses; swarming out of day-hives, swarming towards night-hives; each day the same outpouring. A great pendulum, London, swaying her atoms back and forth, and back again. Queer, the force that keeps the discontented atoms in the pendulum, that keeps them from bursting out, need, hunger, habit, whatever it is! Sometimes they do burst out; there is something about those rebels in the papers each morning.

Makes one a bit dizzy to think of it, sitting in the tube, with something happening out yonder; pretend-

ing to be reading the papers, bottled up in a hole in the earth; makes one a bit dizzy. Organization of day-hives and night-hives, each man in his place or on his way there, seven millions! Makes one wonder what disorganization would be like, the chaos of a great city like London, should the atoms all run wild. Like an anthill kicked by some careless boot—Jolly row that, if some cosmic boot were to kick London, centrifugal force gone balmy!

An accident like this in the underground gives a man a suggestion of it; a taste of the menace of his own inventions! Stuck in an underground hole; all of us encouraging underground holes in order, if luck is with one, to save five minutes a day. Cars all piled up ahead, nobody knowing what the row is! Go back, that's all they can do, going back slowly so that the other trains coming along fast to save those precious five minutes may not lose all the time that's coming to them this side of eternity. Going back slowly, and Alma getting frazzled because he's going to be late for dinner!

No 'busses. Of course, no 'busses when the fog is like a rain, and there's an accident in the subway. Hordes in the street, stepping on one's feet; and no 'busses! Everybody pushing, and then a jam of crowded 'busses refusing to stop. No extra 'busses, of course, no extra 'busses. That's the trouble with seven millions; the pendulum's too big. It can't be ready for emergencies.

Our own inventions trap us. Depend on electricity to get you home at the exact moment, timing yourself so that the dinner will be on the table, and no chance

for talk to spoil your appetite, if you have an appetite, and there you are, miles from home, and the 'busses not stopping! Or a storm takes the telephone wires down, and Fleet Street is in a panic. Not enough messengers to go round; not enough messengers if the pendulum's been depending on electricity. Miles from home, and not enough money in your pockets to hire a hansom even if you dared to. Never enough money in those pockets to hire a hansom.

Alma would think he was crazy. It were better to be late. He could see the way her lips would shut. Which was worse, the bitter self-repression, or the floodtide when at last released? It was bad when it came, the floodtide, but at least the suspense was past. It was over, then, for a time. If he had the money, he'd dare it; he'd take a hansom. Just to shake his pendulum. A man isn't a machine! There's a horse down. Poor beggar. Swung out of the pendulum, he has! Leg's broken. Has to be shot.

Standing on the street corner swearing at the 'busses that won't stop to take you home, and dreading to get home. Wondering if they are all like that, if that's all that home means to the man in the crowd, just a bad dinner and a bed? Only one of the seven millions; waiting on the street corner in the fog that's like a rain. Part of the machinery of the city, going back to get oiled for the next day's whirring. That's all it amounts to. Getting up, and going to work, to make the tenth part of a shoe, or the fourth part of a box, or keeping books about wool and goat's hair that *you* never see or get the feel of; invoice as close

as a man ever gets to wool and goat's hair in Fetter Lane!

That's where the Cape beats London, the Cape before things happened. The days in the saddle on the Karroo; the long, silent nights! Was it the same Wade Graeme? Life all ahead of him then; life to his shaping. Life all back of him now. Waiting on the corner for a 'bus to stop that he might get home. Home! Gas sputtering in the hall; smell of the dinner greeting you; a burned smell, and somebody angry with you. That's home.

At last, a 'bus stopping.

Hanging to the step rail, struggling for a foothold when at last you've pushed your way up; pushing and being pushed for a place by sharp featured women. What has happened to the world that all women now look like that, angry and pushing? Swarming, is it that does it, over-swarming? The struggling for a place in the pendulum-sweep, day-hive and night-hive? Hating it, the struggle and the hanging-on; never getting any fun out of it, and yet fighting for it, this thing we call life, perhaps because it isn't living!

Unreal, it all seemed. Always with him, that haunting sense of unreality. This deadening routine had no relation to him, to the real Wade Graeme, the boy of Surrey, the son of Wade House, or to that lonely youth who used to ride over the long, silent stretches of the Karroo. The procession of days winding ahead of him, of days just like this, wet nights like this; always on the way home to get oiled up for the morrow, or on the way back after being oiled up; nothing else ahead of him, so why shouldn't it begin to

feel natural? Yet never could he rid himself of that sensation of unreality. As though he were masking through some pantomime or dream, which would break into fact, and the real Wade Graeme be at last revealed.

This the real Wade Graeme, who belonged to the woman in the red jersey, with the list to her walk, her hair done up in a tight knot, and her lips pressed together; the same whom that high-bred, silver-voiced lady used to call with accenting pride: *My son*. Her son had never planned this. Something quite different he'd planned!

A small place in the country, Surrey, perhaps. Decent, but probably small. No matter how small it was, so that it was decent. He'd expected to be poor for awhile, until the publishers would take notice of him, and pass his name along. A room all lined with books, with soft, shaded lights, and with him the sort of woman he understood sitting on the other side of the fireplace, reading, or listening to him while he read. Liking to do the sort of things he liked to do, his *kind* liked to do,—and draping the daily task with the graciousness of beauty and self control. *Her* lips not pressed tight together, and opening only over terrible, clipping words! Tennis on Saturday afternoons, and then tea with little biscuits and some sticky sweets. At his desk in the mornings, a desk by a window overlooking the downs; spinning out his dreams; writing the Thing as he saw it; writing about life—God! Was this the life he would have written of, the life he was living, he the man that that boy had become?

A machine, that's all he was, a hopeless machine,

swinging from the office to Bird Place, and back to the office again. Bird Place, instead of Surrey, where the gas jet sputters and sighs in the hall; threadbare carpet on the stairs because he wasn't man enough to be able to put a decent one there; yellow painted woodwork, peeling in spots. The room one lived in calling a living-room, because a man's soul had died in it. No books. No books in Bird Place. Alma said they couldn't afford books; and Alma knew. She kept the accounts.

It shamed him, how illy he provided for them, for Alma, and the piteous little undeveloped girl! The dining-room still bleaker, dark and chilly unless the door into the kitchen let in the smells with the heat. And the worse for those terrible pictures she'd brought with her from the Cape, overglossed dishes of over-coloured fruit. 'The jaundiced walls would be better without them, but she clung to every memory of Capetown. Their table cheerless and accusing:— One can't have a cheerful table unless one earns enough to give one's wife, and if one earns enough, one wouldn't be caught living in Bird Place, and there you are, the *real* Wade Graeme!

At last a seat in the 'bus! That's the reason people are willing to go on, getting tired enough to enjoy the mere sitting still! Oh, of course! A woman with a baby in her arms must get on and stand on the platform, looking straight at you! You can't keep your eyes shut and pretend you don't know she's there. You can't, because once long ago you were the Wade Graeme she used to call "My son."

Out to the platform, swaying again, swaying into

drowsiness. The longer one works, the more one sleeps; and less time for thinking, less time for self-reproaches. Men can live because they can sleep through half their life!

At last, Hoxton. Have to stay awake now, Wade Graeme, for soon it will be Hoxton Square, and a man must look lively for Haberdasher Street, or he'll be carried past the quick corner; and that means a walk back to Haberdasher Street, and Bird Place.

This Haberdasher Street? Might be anywhere, for all the outlines he could see. Had to trust to instinct to know which way to dive! Full right, into a sea of fog.

Head down, counting his steps to be sure when he reaches his house, two hundred and eighty steps from Haberdasher. He could not see, for all his straining, the brickfaced houses squaring the motheaten group of shrubbery which no one but the babies in perambulators, or their flirting nurses, ever took seriously. Couldn't even see the doorsteps, a hundred and sixty houses, veiled by the fog, as alike, alike as sheep. Feeling his way, and counting, sixty, sixty-eight, eighty, ninety, a hundred. A little extra speed towards the end, because of the fog in his face; and at last there, one seven-millionth of London at his own door.

Something was wrong with his key. His fingers perhaps slippery from the fog. Put it upside down, perhaps. Some one calling to him:

"The door is on the latch!"

Suddenly music and poetry and warmth!

He took the key from the door.

If it had been you coming home, one of the seven

millions; if for eight years you had been fighting your way home through sleet and rains, in tubes and in 'busses; dozing in the tube, or swaying from a 'bus-rail; if you had been groping your way through the fog, counting your steps to lead you straight; if it had been you, the man you did not intend to be, and your key did not fit, and a voice had called to you, a voice that sounded like Surrey, that sounded like the voices which used to call to you: "The door is on the latch!" would you have wakened at once from the fog you were in, known at once that you had miscounted, that it was not your house, that that voice had nothing to do with you, for what could voices with poetry and music and warmth have to do with a failure like you? Would you have known at once that the pendulum was sweeping you too far? "Back at once, atom of the pendulum, you are in another man's house! Back to Haberdasher Street, and start counting over again!" With the door on the latch?

Music, and poetry, and warmth.

Graeme pushed in the door.

CHAPTER II

THE ROOM OF ROSES

NOT quite awake yet; eyes blinking from the fog and the shock or light; the two Wade Graemes claiming reality. His hall; and yet not his hall. Some one had been doing jolly things to it. What had she done with that old cracked globe? Had *she* made that silk shade, Alma? Growing plants on the table. Like Surrey. The carpet wasn't threadbare—it wasn't his hall! He'd got into the wrong house. Felt like home to the other Wade Graeme. Going to get kicked out for a burglar? He heard something fall.

He turned to go back, when the door behind him opened. Wheeling, he had a vision of a glow. Like spring coming through the open door! Roses beyond, roses and shaded lights framing her face. It wasn't angry with him, or afraid. Angelic pity in the eyes staring at him. He wasn't going to get kicked out. The light from the fire beyond made her hair into a halo. He couldn't be on Bird Place. He was still dozing in the tube.

"Why, you're frozen!"

Like a benediction, her sympathy. Thought he was an outcast? Well, wasn't he? Outcast from all this, the comfort, the warmth and roses.

Dazed, drunkenly, he followed her into a wonderful room, soft and shaded and perfumed. His house. That is, the same sort of house; windows in the same place, doors in the same place, but jolly things done to them! Rose-covered walls, rose-chintzed chairs and cushions, a miracle in Bird Place! Grate on the same side, but glorified with white enamel; a fire glowing, not grumbling; cheer and warmth. No one angry with him.

“Warm yourself.”

He spread his fingers to the blaze, getting as he turned, a picture of that side of the room. Pictures on the mantel, shaded candlesticks. In the corner, a couch, with tousled cushions, where she had been lying down when he startled her. Her book was lying face downwards on the floor. It was that he'd heard fall—

He would tell her how it had happened. But her look, of swift surprise, as of recognition, halted him. He wasn't the pigeon she thought him.

“*I was lost. I was frozen!*” Then he called himself an idiot for answering a thought that she had not voiced.

“I thought at first, you know, that you were my husband. I was deep in my book. I forget where I am when I'm reading. Then when you did not come in, it startled me.”

“A burglar,—a tramp, and now what?”

Curious to be talking to her like this; to be enjoying himself. Like the old Wade Graeme.

“Another one of us; players; masquerading in Bird Place. I've often seen you passing.”

Not even in Surrey had he heard such a voice. Tender, caressive, making music of the words!

"I always knew it would happen, sometime in a fog like this. The houses all alike, the steps going up the same way!"

She, too, had always known it would happen!

"I counted the steps from Haberdasher Street—" he wanted to tell her.

Such a delicious little smile she gave him! "All of us have to count the steps, or the houses, in a night like this!"

"I'm sorry! I've been counting them for eight years to keep from making a mistake like this." Silly British phrase, that. *I'm sorry*. 'To be here?

"Isn't it terrible, how we do it? How we live? That we can build one hundred and sixty of them, did you know it? Have you counted them? And not a window different? Stairs in the same place. Doors in the same place. One hundred and sixty families living the same way. Eating in the same dark room; going up the same narrow stairs to bed; getting up facing the same square, one hundred and sixty families of us. Original, aren't we?"

He grabbed at the respite she was allowing him. A man can't go while she is talking to him, can he? Even if he has stumbled by mistake into her house. He has to answer, doesn't he? Gives him a chance to look around the room to see what they could do to their house, if Alma were willing. Alma said it took money to make over a room, but if these people had money they wouldn't be living in Bird Place!

"I, too, have often thought of it," he replied.

"Every day, in fact." He was noticing the books, shelves of books, books on the table. "The hives of homes; lives going on inside the same way. And bye and bye a funeral; coffin going down the steps,—just an accident if it's at one-forty, or at one-forty-eight! Soon another at one-forty-eight, and going down the same way!"

Strangers, they stared at each other, forgetting they were strangers, in their shocked understanding of Bird Place.

She spoke again, her eyes wistful, as though tears were just behind them. "It makes life—terrible! It shouldn't be that way. I suppose it can't be helped when we will crowd so!"

How pretty she looked there among her roses! Sorrow in her eyes; sorrow for them all. Some of that sorrow for him.

"It's bound to get worse." His voice answered. "In the big centres like London. It's a machine. It crushes all the poetry out of life—"

"Oh no," she cried. "Not if it's not dead in *you*!" He had thought her eyes were grey. Black they looked that instant when they flashed. "There will always be poetry in things, to the poet. Hasn't Kipling proved that? Think of the 'Miracles'! We think that everything's prosaic, or that it's all been said, and then the real poet comes along, and shows us the poetry which is lying all about us. A railroad track, a telegraph wire is inspiration to the poet. Queer, I was thinking of that when your step came on the stairs. I was reading a poem that made me think

of it." She moved to retrieve the fallen book, but he jumped to get it for her.

Poetry. Long since he'd held a book of poetry in his hands. Hands that added figures of wool and goat's hair all day long in Fetter Lane!

"It's new, rather. There's one that's wonderful to me. He has put us all into it, the crowds, the mass of us. Have you read him? He's fairly grabbed London! He makes it throb, beat in rhythm, the crowds, the city streets, the loneliness. It's rough and vulgar, somewhat, but it is real poetry, with the heart in it."

He wished that she would not pause. When she stopped speaking, he must go. Wasn't decent to stay unless she kept on talking. He hadn't heard all she had said, for he was thinking of the voice itself; he could listen to that straying, lilting voice for ever. Thinking of the voice rather than of the words it was caressing. In a minute this would be ended. Then he would find himself on the outside of that door again.

He had placed the book on the table, but he picked it up again. A foolish notion, to gain a minute in that room. If he might write down the name? He wanted to read it, the poem she had spoken of, the one that proved there was poetry in London.

"It will never be quite the same to you, after, London won't." Was it fancy that the voice was a little more reserved as though she knew he was stretching his privilege? As though she wished to suggest to him that he must realize this was an unusual incident, his

falling in upon her like a piece of machinery gone wrong, a bolt shot loose. That she did not talk to strangers this way. But a neighbour, one who had lived eight years in Bird Place! She did not say it. It was in her voice, in the eyes that watched him as he jotted down the name of the poet in his notebook, among other notes, of wool and goat's hair!

Then a silence. Which told him he should be off, and at once; that he had stayed already too long. He couldn't pretend to want to warm his fingers, now that she knew his own house was a few steps from here. One assumes that people have fires in their grates on nights like this. He stole another look at her bower as he put the notebook back in his pocket.

Still silence; which told him he must go.

"It was good of you, to understand. I'll be even more careful counting, after this. Two hundred and eighty, that's mine." He was dragging out this wonderful adventure.

"We're two hundred and sixty."

One more look around the pretty room before he left. He wanted to carry it away with him, her setting, the couch with the crushed cushions, the chintz covered chairs, the work basket with the silks out-tumbling, and the books. Alma said it took money to turn a house into a home. Yet this was a home; in Bird Place.

He took a step or two towards the door. "I didn't know that there could be a room like this in Bird Place."

He saw the flush of a pride that was creative spread over her face. "It used to be terrible. Was yours

like that? Fearful woodwork, yellow grained woodwork, and paper that made your soul creep."

"Jaundiced paper!" *Was* it that way? No need of telling her that it was that way still; that it made his soul creep every evening when he sat there alone, Alma in the kitchen, or upstairs with the child. Not necessary to tell her that there was not a snug corner in his house where a man wants to stay, to settle down. Always restless in his house; no comfortable chairs; no good lights, no warmth.

"Oh, I know," she was saying. "I scraped it all off! Scraped my fingers, too! They said it wouldn't show, staying on the walls, but I couldn't bear to think of it being underneath, even, under my roses! I'd found this paper, and a man came who was willing to work for his meals, and I helped him, and then I found this chintz,—"
Full stop. Reserve covering the glow, like ashes smothering the flame. She had forgotten he was a stranger in that instant of swift sympathy. He moved reluctantly towards the door.

His back was towards her. How did he know that her hand went out to recall him? How did he know that he should not go, that it was already too late? Too late for what? She had not spoken. But it came to him; before looking at her, it came to him.

His eyes demanded the reason for her visible distress. It was that of a child, as though she had been caught pilfering sweets. Little more than a child, after all. Pity had lent her for the moment a deceptive, maternal look. What was it she was fearing?

He heard a step on the stairs, outside, and then a key moving in the lock.

"The door is unlocked, it's on the latch," she called, but tremulously. And then to him, she added: "My husband."

Jaundiced paper under those roses! Her childish panic, her blanching cheeks, her widening eyes, armored him. If she would tell him what she wished him to do, he would do it, but then he heard the outer door opening. No time to say anything. He couldn't get out the back way without being heard? He knew the way out of that house. No time!

He mustn't think that there was anything wrong, but her husband would not understand her talking to a stranger like this, letting him into the house. And she liked to have him like things. It kept things pleasant, his liking things. He could not get out without being heard, or seen, and that would be worse, getting caught, and having to explain, than staying, and trying to make it seem right?

His thoughts rioting, foolishly? or hers? Not a word spoken; her mind fluttering all those fears to him. A child, and perhaps all those fears unfounded. But she could trust him. He'd fix it up. It was all his fault—

The door opened, and the husband walked in.

He was a middle-aged, well-kept Britisher. Cheeks a little heavy; eyes over-pale; scrupulously groomed, over-groomed. Even to the swift glance, the grooming was overdone. It was veneer; plenty of veneer. He knew that type, and despised it. Understood now why this soft, tender child was afraid. Smug brute; ironically polite, and hard to deal with. Why didn't he say something? Wasn't his place to speak first.

But he wasn't going to let her be sorry that she wanted the man she thought a beggar to get warm. The heart and courage of her, asking a tramp into her house that he might warm his fingers! His mind working fast, hunting for an excuse for being found in that house. With her book in his hand. As though a friendly call. He'd forgotten her book. That was his cue. Her book.

"Who is this, Isabel?"

She looked at him helplessly; why, she didn't even know his name!

"I hope that you will persuade your wife that she wants to buy this book, sir." Wasn't worried now since he'd decided to be a book agent! He wouldn't look again at her. "It's a new poet; Noyes? He's making quite a stir. Maybe you've heard of him? It's neatly put up, and just three shillings, sixpence. It's a book that ought to be in every gentleman's house."

"It's a wonder that you need any persuasion, Isabel!" Smug, bland voice; a fat, superior voice. "I fancy I got home just in time, or it would have *belonged* in my house." Fat innuendo under a smug pleasantry. "Do you always bring book-agents into the house?"

Graeme hastened to interpose.

"It was cold outside for the lady."

"I'm not buying books. We have too many already."

"It's my last visit tonight. I'll let you have it for three shillings."

"I don't want it,"

"Two shillings." Was this Wade Graeme, dreamer of Surrey, and of the Cape, or the machine of Fetter Lane? Enjoying himself! Wishing he might steal a glance at her face. 'This was adventure. He felt prankish; more like a boy than in ten long years.

"I don't want it as a gift. I don't want agents coming to this house. This way."

The broad shoulders of the husband were between Graeme and the haloed face he wanted once more to see. She turned, though, towards the fire. Her shoulders, he could see, were quivering. Laughter or tears? Laughter, of course, now that it was all over, the danger, the scene she had feared. Going off with her book in his hand? A book agent! Of course, laughing.

"Remember the number. 584. Remember that we do not buy books here." The voice was smooth, covered. "Remember the number and don't come back to it."

The door slammed behind him. Bland brute. Bland British brute!

Graeme stood staring at the door.

Her book still in his hand. Rotten trick, to be carrying off her book. What else could he have done, once he'd dropped into that fool masquerade? Alma would see it, and would twit him with extravagance. Alma! And the dinner spoiling! He'd forgotten Alma.

How long had he been in there? How long staring at that shut door? He didn't want to look at his watch, but he had to know the worst, had to know before he went home, in order to know what to say.

Where was all his prankishness gone? Not seven o'clock yet? All that happened in a few minutes? Life seemed to have changed its colour since he pushed in that door.

Back to Haberdasher Street, and starting right this time; starting from the corner, and then on, two hundred and eighty steps. No mistakes now; not dreaming; wide awake, never more wide awake.

All the shades down at five hundred and eighty-four. Looked like all the rest from here; roses and shaded lights all shut in. He thought he saw a chink of rosy light. There, it went out. Going in to their dinner, he supposed. Have to economize and turn off the gas when you go into dinner, if you're so poor that you have to live at Bird Place! Rummy setting for that tender child, Bird Place!

Queer thing to have happened to him, to the dull machine, Graeme. Jerked him out of his rut. Two hundred and eighty. Wonder if Alma would detect the excitement in his face? She always used to know when he had seen his mother, before all that had ended, too. She knew when he had seen any of the old friends, whom he never saw now. He couldn't keep up with them; and it made it unpleasant at home. Though she didn't like him, she didn't want others to like him. Queer beings women are, some women are!

His key fitting; his own door this time. But not so grey, somehow, not so hopeless, as it was an hour ago. Those few minutes in that room of roses, and everything seemed different. Buoyant! Queer, that he, Graeme, coming home, could feel buoyant! But it would not be that way long. She had a way of keep-

ing things the same; a dead level of sameness; keeps you where you belong, as though she had clapped a weight on you.

The gas jet spitting under the cracked globe, garishly revealing the stark outlines of the sordid hall. A pervading smell of pot roast, scorched pot roast, and greasy vegetables. His house all right.

“What are you leaving the door open for? There’s a draught!”

The voice of his wife; coming from the kitchen.

As a well-drilled subaltern, Graeme shut the door.

CHAPTER III

HUSBAND AND WIFE

A THIN veil of fog crept with him into the hall. No mistake this time. His home; no roses here, grey and discouraging.

He slipped the book of poems into his pocket. How in Hades was he going to get it back to her, to Isabel?

Could she see that hall, she would know what he was, a failure. It was what Alma told him every day. Told him in words; told him by her grim silences; told it by that angry stare of hers when he left his plate untouched. A long time ago he'd stopped asking her what was the matter with the butcher! They had to have poor meat, the cheap cuts, because the husband, not the butcher, was the failure!

He wondered, often, if it could really grate on her as much, the coarse meals, the worn carpets, the broken globes; on Krieger's daughter? Saying the name recalled his image, the rough beard and nicotine stained teeth, stained nails, his carpet slippers, the carpet slippers which pattered interminably about the house over which he was king. Such screaming carpets in that Cape home; bric-a-brac that made one's nerves ache! Could this desperately offend her, Krieger's daughter? Having seen one or two other

homes, Wade House, the Knights', could it mean as much to her, the lack of beauty, as though she had grown up with it?

There was no fire in the chilly, dark sitting-room. Of course, no fire in the sitting-room!

His wife found him standing by the empty grate, looking down into it. "With your hat on!" she exclaimed. "And the dinner—waiting an hour already! It's all spoiled. I suppose you had dinner downtown with some of your grand friends!"

He told her about the accident. He did not yet know what had happened, but "there they were, caught in the tube, with cars all piled up ahead of them. They had to go back."

He had had a similar story to tell several times before in those dazed eight years, but this time it sounded false to his own ears, too. Because of those few minutes in that room two houses away; because of that queer relationship of sympathy between himself and the girl with the haloing hair.

"And the 'busses all crowded; not stopping. And not enough money for a hansom."

"A hansom!"

"I said I didn't have enough money for a hansom. Better than letting the dinner get spoiled, and keeping you in the kitchen, Alma."

"As though you care where I keep! And you don't seem to be in a hurry to keep it from spoiling now! As I can see. Ten minutes in the tube. Ten waiting for a 'bus. It don't make the time you've been on the way!" argued Alma.

Though he was still staring into the grate, he knew

she was looking at him; that her lips were drawn as tight as the knot of hair at the top of her head; that she was standing, listing; both hands on her hips, the Capetown way. Her red jersey on. That, of course, was his fault, her having to wear the old red jersey. The old, sick feeling overcame him; like physical nausea, the loathing of his life. 'Thought he'd conquered that weakness long ago. Girlish, that sort of giddiness, Wade Graeme!

"Well, if you don't want any dinner at all!"

He followed her into the dining-room. A little warmer there because the kitchen door had been left open to let the heat in. The cloth was mussed and askew, clean enough, but crushed; it looked like a servants' table. A cheap cloth, the rotten sort, the kind failures have to have. The roast was already on the table, spoiled. His fault. A veil of grease was settling over the gravy, and the same disheartening glaze covered the vegetables which had been cooked with the meat. A man had to be a good soldier or a wolf to stomach it. Mothers ought not to teach their sons to be fastidious or dainty if this sort of thing is ahead of them!

He took the seat opposite his wife. Ten years he had been doing it, sitting opposite Alma. Ten years of dinners like this, eight in London, at Bird Place, and two at the Cape. How many might he reasonably expect to have to live through? Twenty? Thirty? Forty? All like this? Nothing to soften it, to soften her? The Graemes were a sturdy people,—and the Kriegers!

He watched her as a stranger would while she

carved. She always carved. She did not hack the roast as he did. She could make it do for two or three days. He wished she didn't. If there were anything he hated, it was warmed over meats. Cooked to death the first night, like leather the second. Nice thing, knowing it is ahead of you, three nights running, burned beef!

Wondering again why she had ever married him! Had she ever really liked him? For a long time now he had been doubting it. That first week when he'd taken her to Johannesburg for her wedding trip, he had been mystified by her tears. Excitement, he'd decided, leaving home, girlishness.

Leaving old Krieger! Was it reasonable to believe that she had ever wasted any tears on old Krieger? He didn't know much about women, except his mother's kind. How could he know anything about Alma? It wasn't long before it had dawned on him that it was himself she was shrinking away from in tears, not life, but himself. And soon the doctor was telling him that it was not abnormal, for women in her condition.

It didn't stop when the baby came. It grew worse. By that time, he knew that she hated him. Then why, he still asked himself, why had she ever married him? He had never thought of her, in that way, the wife, sweetheart way, not even when she had planned that trip up Table Mountain. She had seemed old to him; and different, foreign. The Cape girls *were* different. Not like the English girls, the girls of Surrey. And Alma was still more unlike, a Krieger, unlovely.

Why the day he went on that excursion, wasn't he

carrying in his pocket as a sort of holy secret a picture of Janice, the girl he'd kissed good-bye back of the hedge in the Surrey garden?

No pledges, they'd had no time for pledges. Her mother's voice came on the other side of the hedge. Well guarded was Janice by that careful mother of hers! He'd nothing to offer her. He'd had to make his letters frightfully circumspect, hoping she'd read between the lines, but dreaming of her, of going home to her all those long days and nights on the Karroo! He had never once thought of Alma in that wonderful, cosy, creepy way!

Hadn't Alma assured him they were going to meet their friends on top of the mountain, to eat lunch with them, and then all come down together? And no friends to be found, search and call as they would. Darkness finding them still searching—at least he had thought then that they were searching! Had taken them all night to get back, and found old Krieger's door locked against them. Then Alma had cried, and he had tried to comfort her. Excited him, his rôle of comforter; he could realize now how dramatic and important he had felt taking her part against old Krieger, against the world. How could he be expected to know anything about woman's ways, as mysterious to a boy of his age as that God-forsaken country of theirs!

In his arms, she had sobbed that she cared for him. He knew now that she had lied. She had never cared for him. She only wanted to get away from old Krieger, from his oaths, and his coarse anger. Queer, when she got what she wanted, why she couldn't be a

little gentle with him! Women are queer beings; that kind of women.

Two sorts; one like his mother and the girl down the street, the kind who make life soft and gentle and fragrant; and the kind who shove you in the tubes, in the 'busses, those of the hard faces, like Alma's.

He looked at the empty place; the highchair still there; some fresh spots, grease spots; scattered crumbs and a drained milk glass.

"Where is little Alma?"

"Do you think I could keep her up so late?"

And they fell to the work in front of them. For what is there to talk about? The one decent thing about a meal is that it is an excuse for not talking.

Talking isn't decent; it doesn't show you where you are going. It gets you into tight places; into corners you don't see quickly enough. And then you know what a rotter you are, how wretched you have made your wife; how hard she has to work, harder than any other woman on the square; all of it, that you know already by heart, over and over again.

At last it was over, the feeding and the being fed.

One couldn't call it dining. That implies a social hour. Feeding the engine, that's what eating is at Bird Place. Enough life stored up to last over the night, and then another sullen meal to carry you down to the office where you can earn just enough money to buy some more meals like this. God! And men go on living!

Reaching for his napkin, his fingers touched a hard pocket. Her book. He had forgotten for an instant of rebellion his wonderful adventure.

"I think I'll read the paper for awhile."

"It's nice to have time to read the papers," commented Alma.

His anticipations were dashed. "*You* read a bit, Alma, and I'll clear the dishes off. I'd like to." He meant it. He'd enjoy his paper more, after.

"This is my part. Earning it is your part." She fell to the task of clearing off the table.

Again she reminded him that he was a failure. Never a time when she did not rub salt on the open wound. Maybe, she did not know that it was a wound. Because he was silent, didn't moan over things, did she think he didn't care, that he was callous, as well as lazy? For you can't explain things to Alma. It always makes them worse. You've just got to go on.

He turned up the gas in the dingy chandelier; in that room whose contour was like the room of roses. The gas would not go high. Alma had had a regulator put on. Made it hard to read. Made your eyes burn the next day.

Not the book yet. Not while Alma might be coming in. The newspaper, first, or at least, he would seem to be reading the paper. Before it had a chance to fade he wanted to go over that curious adventure; from the minute of putting his key in the lock, when she had called to him.

What had impelled him, daze or destiny, to obey that voice? What had pulled him into a house that he knew was not his? No use trying to deny that fact; dazed as he was, he had known it was not his house. Could analyze the result of his acquiescence, but not

the act itself. Five minutes before, had he been asked in the tube, say, what he would do under such circumstances, he would have answered glibly, why the only answer possible for a commonplace machineman who has no appetite for adventure!

A man does not have to enter a strange house because a voice from inside explains that the door is on the latch. Not a sober, self-respecting Englishman. The experience safely his, he knew that he would do the same thing over again; would do it better, with more finesse, would carry away the satisfaction of having met the situation. Though, after all, it hadn't been so blunderingly done, in spite of his daze;—odd, how the book agent notion had jumped into his head!

The door is on the latch!

Nothing in his commonplace conservative experience could explain why the machinery of his life had then failed him. Intriguing, it was to his imagination. Gave a deeper significance to all that came after—

Even queerer than obeying her call, was his understanding her unspoken thoughts. Her fears had reached him; he had answered her, and not a word spoken! Sounds rummy, put into words, but it was true. No time to say anything, once that man's key had scraped in the lock. No mistake, he hadn't misread her fear, either. Nice mess that would have been! Suppose he had thought she was frightened, and had plunged into the masquerade on a wrong cue? He would have been kicked out then for impertinence, all right. But it was not a mistake. She had been frightened. Wished he could have seen her face once more before being

pushed out by that bland brute; wished he could have been sure if there were tears in those eyes, the eyes that looked like deep moonlit pools, or if it had been laughter, relieved laughter. Pretty figure he'd cut, walking off like a whipped cur, with his stolen bone! Her book in his hand. A book agent!

Sometime later, he would have time for this speculation, what twist of fate it was that had given a girl of thrill and flame into the care of that smug Englishman. But not tonight. He would not put anything tonight between himself and the sharp memory of that astonishing incident. He wanted to make the picture his. Wanted to muse over the queer mental sympathy, the quick call and response which the husband had not sensed or deflected. He felt a glow warm his breast. Not since he had kissed Janice in the Surrey garden had he felt so alive, so pulsingly youthful. His blood ran glowing from breast to brow.

Never again would Bird Place be hopelessly prosaic; life even there had the flavour of adventure, of progress. Because of that vitalizing sympathy. Understanding, that is the thing that lifts men above the brute. Not just drinking and eating in order to live; not just sleeping that one may be fit to earn enough to eat again! Poetry— "If you've any of it in you!" He used to think he had it in him.

Just as though he had been starving, and had been given food!

Only one house in between her house and his, between this, and that room of roses! He wished it were the next house. It swept over him like a paternal wistfulness the wish that her house were next, near

enough to hear her call; their walls touching, as good friends, cool cheek to cheek.

A house in between, *don't* be forgetting that, Wade Graeme, husband and father. No sheltering friendships from you. That's all ended. You're finished. Other men may have friendships, or the other kind, even. Some men manage to attain a free, individual life, but it's not for you. Your minutes, like your shillings, must all be accounted for. "Ten minutes late, and where have you been all that time?" And: "How do I know that your salary hasn't been raised this year?"

That is what marriage means to some people; belonging, accounting. Slavery. Why isn't one told, prepared for that sort of life, if it's always possible, and if there's no way of getting out, once one has fallen in? Other mistakes one has a chance to retrieve, one's business, one's partner, but if one makes this sort of blunder, it's the business of the state to see that one keeps on making it, fulfills the consequences of that mistake. Then why aren't young people warned that it can be slavery, told of the laws which protect a bad bargain even if it bind one into slavery?

It wasn't as though he had persisted in making a hot-blooded, hot-headed marriage, against the will of his people. A girl had cried, afraid of a passionate father, and to save her the consequences of a walk *she* had planned, he had bound himself for life, not knowing anything about the slavery business, not knowing free men could be slaves unless they didn't mind a row every hour or so. He had thrown his life away for some one who didn't care for it, and England says he

was old enough to know better, and so he must stand by his bargain, must pretend to stand by his bargain. Would anybody marry if he realized what it might mean?

Something of that had come to his mother; as a regret, as though she had fallen short in her sweet solicitude, herself responsible for that which had befallen her son. Never a look of reproach, not even when the intimate relationship had to be broken, had she given him. Every childish danger had she prepared him for, but about the one momentous one, nothing.

After Alma refused to go again to Surrey, after that last terrible day, he had tried to keep up the old sweet intimacy. Their letters, their love had never failed, but Alma thought his home trips were an extravagance; it came to be a twice a year visit. But never with Alma again.

He didn't like to remember that episode, the white, thoroughbred pain of his mother, the lashing, distorting anger of the daughter he had brought her—

It had crushed Mary Graeme. Too fine ever to refer to it, covering it over with silence. "Her son's wife was not very well." Or: "The child could not be left alone." An extra pressure of the hand at parting to let him know that she understood.

He had realized then how hopeless it was. If one couldn't get along with his mother, no use expecting friendship or sympathy for himself. Had he ever seen his mother give way to anger? Self control was the Wade creed. "The mark of the thoroughbred, my son!" He could see her now saying it.

Even her first shock she had covered. She had come all the way from Surrey to meet them at the steamer, white and tremulous over the ordeal, but what else could a mother do when her son was bringing his wife and child home? Alma was pacing the deck, the baby on her hip, list already there from that steady pacing. She had a jersey on then, too, a grey jersey, and a grey knitted cap over her tightly twisted hair.

"Alma?"

He had observed the same look of incredulity on the faces of their fellow passengers when Alma had emerged from her cabin, several days out. He saw it later when his friends met her. But that was the only word from his mother. Her cordiality hid the strain. He fancied the girl, Isabel, was like that. "Couldn't bear to think of that terrible paper being underneath her roses!" Wonderful, how it had awakened him, how those few minutes in there had started the old memories stirring!

He could hear Alma's step; leaving the kitchen; stopping at the front door to try the lock. He knew when she paused to lower the spitting gas jet. Knew when she came in. His paper was particularly engrossing just then. No need to speak unless he were spoken to; not when her lips looked like that. Knew just how her lips were pressed together. How long was it decent to pretend that he did not know that she was standing in front of him?

"Be sure to turn out the gas when you come up. You left it burning last night."

"Did I leave it burning?"

Wonder why all women don't wear their hair that soft and jolly way? Like a halo. Must be lots easier than screwing it up into a tight knot. Why should a woman *want* to look like the cartoons? It isn't fair to her; unless she likes to look martyred. But he would never dare to suggest it to her again. She would say that he should not have married a servant.

"What are you staring at me for?"

He wasn't staring. He was sorry, sorry about the gas.

Scornful, silent incredulity! If she hated him so, if every word he said was vitriol to her soul, why did she stay with him? Why in some of those moments of deep anger did she never threaten to go back to her father? To old Krieger who was still pattering around in carpet slippers, with a blackened tooth or so yet in his mouth? It wasn't decent, living like this. Holy, maybe, but not decent. It humbled him, took the stiffening out of his soul.

Couldn't look Fackenthal or Knight in the eyes, not since they knew— They had all seen—had seen her let go. A man can't take the first step, not because he doesn't care. It isn't that he's afraid. It's like discarding a shabby coat, or an old horse, something nobody wants.

"I'll be coming up soon."

"You needn't hurry." The way she had of making her words work! The threat of the storm! Queer, that a man isn't relieved when he sees the muddied waters are not going to overflow this time. Thinks instead of the minute ahead when the dikes must give way. Not nice, thinking of the dikes! One ought

to enjoy the respite, instead of fearing—but it isn't fear. A man isn't afraid of his wife. It isn't decent to have scenes, that's all there is to that. No one raised right, in gentle homes, can stand scenes.

"Sit down?" He got up and moved a chair for her, a straight-backed, comfortless chair, like all the rest, a little nearer to the fireless grate.

"Thank you!" Her surprise hit him like a well-aimed blow.

"Don't you want to see the paper?"

"I'm too tired. It's late. But sometime, I *would* like to see the paper. To know what is going on."

"I leave it home for you, Alma."

"I've no time during the day."

"You keep too much mewed up, Alma. Can't you get out oftener with the—with Alma?" He had almost said the baby! He knew what would happen should he say that!

"Mewed up! I keep too much mewed up!" The dikes threatened to cave in.

He hastened to say, "I know. I'm mewed up in the office, and you at home. There's not much fun in it, is there?"

She looked at him as though he were a stranger.

"I try to do my duty." She lifted her jersey-covered arm to the gas-jet, lowering it. "I'm going to bed now."

He watched her leave the room, listing, unlovely, unloving. She was his wife. That was the reason she did not say good-night to him. Greetings, courtesy, the lubricating oil of our daily life, that's for friends, for comrades. Artificial, unnecessary, be-

tween husband and wife who do not love each other. Wonder if friends ever marry, that is, do they stay friends? Not lovers,—*friends*?

Those two, that other pair, what happened to them? Had they ever loved each other, meaning been fond of each other? Why was she afraid to let *him* know that she had been kind to a stranger, a man she thought a frozen tramp? Disturbing memories of his own home! A love match that had been, his father's and mother's. Satisfied, probably to the end, his father had been with his model housekeeper, his self-controlled banker, for that was what Mary Graeme was to the man she had married. But *friends*? Call it friendship, that patient self-effacement? Marriage! The word left a sour taste in his mouth.

He could hear Alma moving about in their room upstairs. He could hear her shuffling about the bed, knew she was turning the covers down, and taking off the coverlet, so that it would not get mussed. He could hear her going into the room where the child slept. Their child. The child that he had to remember was his; the little girl he could not get near because of a fierce passion in Alma he could not understand. It was like jealousy. Sometimes he thought it was jealousy; sometimes fear. The affection she had refused to give to him, she lavished on that piteous child, the child which had never grown up.

He knew that Alma was standing now at the foot of the small bed, watching her offspring with an intensity that was as much like rage as tenderness. He had often come upon her, gazing so. He always felt sorry for her. It must be hard on her, harder on her,

on a mother when a child is like that. For himself, he had got over the first shock. It wouldn't be so bad for Alma if she let herself face it. If she would acknowledge it, accept it, get the right kind of help for little Alma. He couldn't suggest it any more; it always meant a storm. Then for days after, he wouldn't see the child— She insisted on believing his solicitude was dislike— Poor Alma! Caught in the cage with him. Like those caged mice one sees in the bird shop on Old Street. Just going round and round. Makes one's head reel to watch them, knowing they'll keep on going till they die! Picture of himself and Alma, and Bird Place!

Now, she was coming back to her own room. Now, a shoe falling. Now, the other, and a pattering overhead of stockinged feet. An hour, at least, before he could go up, assuming she was asleep—

For some reason he did not wish to recall his adventure just then. Something had intruded between himself and the room of roses; a drab stripe.

But he was not going to let himself fall back to the old warping bitterness. He'd make himself think of other things. City news; even figures of wool and goat's hair. Anything but brooding, but bitterness which gets one nowhere.

Her book! He'd forgotten her book!

CHAPTER IV

THE LAND WHERE THE DEAD DREAMS GO

HE had said there was no poetry in London. No poetry? This wonderful panorama, poem, heart-throb *was* London. No trick about it. Just life. Almost vulgar, as she had said, the drab crowds, sordid contacts; must be vulgar, if real. He had caught it quivering, that writing fellow, pinned it to his page like a struggling moth, a drab dull moth, fluttering to get back to the spring out yonder somewhere. And then—spring come to the city streets! Smell of spring brought back by the wheeling tunes. Drab souls all reaching to the heavens they have known, in the land where the dead dreams go!

Staring into the empty grate, the book closed on his knee, he felt them fall—the shackles that had bound his soul. The comfortless room, the gas-jet burning low, not even Alma sleeping open-mouthed upstairs, nor that piteous child, nor the inflexible conditions of their daily life, nothing could ever again jail his spirit. His soul was his, not to be crushed by any one but himself. What relation did it bear, that thinking, hoping, shrinking part of him to material things outside of him; to Alma? Why should he write “Finished” over that door to the sanctuary which was himself? Finished, because he had made a grim mistake in a partnership? Why should that drag

him down to the level where she was determined they must all stay?

Tribute to that mistake of his he must go on paying by his labour, but his soul belonged to himself. He had been starving it, denying it food and drink, with food and drink within reach! That writing fellow knows the trick! You have to send your soul out for an airing, as a boy takes his dog for a walk! Any reason why the soul must keep within the limits of the pendulum? Wonderful thought unfolding!

Starving! For books, for music, starving his soul! Denying even the good things that had been; he had dreams to remember, if it were not strong enough, that jail-whitened spirit of his, to hope. He had been locking out memory, had denied it as a mocking imp, a sorrow's crown of sorrows. Now, he knew it was false, that notion. It is memory they are feeding on, the souls behind those hopeless faces of the 'busses; dreaming they are of the poppies and the wheat, of the thing they hoped to be.

When you have shut out memory,—and you have murdered hope, a man's soul is dead. Dead soul in a living body! Picture of Wade Graeme, of Bird Place. Head down, butting blindly into the fog, seeing nothing ahead, not listening to the voices following, not hearing those wheeling tunes or the street cries, blind to flashes of colour, of beauty, like lightning rays across a dark sky!

Want to think it is all dark, soundless? Blind atom, caught in the pendulum! Men cannot go on that way; can't stay dead. They may think they are dead, but growth of some sort is going on, if not the

daily, upward strengthening to type, then a noxious, abnormal sort of growth, thwarted life-germs, running wild, breaking down into foulness, riots spreading out to a terrible destruction, but still living, still life. Box yourself up; deny yourself to the wreck that is yourself, you're still going on, going somewhere, Wade Graeme!

When the gas-jet burns too low for reading, if the Cape memories hurt, then try Surrey! Those were wonderful days, though, in the Karroo region, before things happened; days in the saddle, his soul flung out free; nights, on the ground, or on his cot, watching the stars wheel, reaching for something no man has yet conjured into words, no one has been able to press between the leaves of a book. Who was it who sat at his tent door and talked with angels? One of those Bible fellows, Abraham, he fancied. Knew just how he felt; he'd felt that way out there, watching the stars wheel. Not believing, but yearning to believe. For if you could define God to man, would it be God? Wouldn't it take a nick out of the infinite if the finite could limit it with a definition? Some one else has said that. Couldn't remember who. Strange how the old thoughts had come running back!

Son of Mary Graeme, son of a pastor, should have a sturdier belief, but you can't force faith, can you? Pretend it, yes, but feel it? Force your knees to kneel, and your lips to pray, once a week on Sundays, because you've learned the habit, and Sunday is a dull day unless church helps you out—but faith, that's a different thing!

If Alma would not follow him, and of course, she

would not follow him, he would go on alone. If she could not find the time to read the paper, would she ever stop to read a book? What could she do all day,—can it eat up a day, just putting a house to rights and looking after a child that is contented to play like a baby? Sewing a little—but there he was at the old habit, grumbling at her under his breath, stultifying his own mind with the complaints he dared not voice to her!

Moping would send him back at once to the old rut, side by side with her, consumed with self-pity. He was going to leave that rut. He was going to be free. Going to belong to himself. He'd go on outwardly just the same. He'd come home to dinner; he'd bring her his monthly check; receive back his monthly allowance for the following weeks; he'd go on seeming to be a slave, making the gestures of slavery, but his soul belonged henceforth to himself. He'd stop smoking. Not because Alma hated the smell on his clothes, but that with the surreptitious savings he might now and then buy a book which he could keep at the office.

Starving! Starving for books and all the rest of it. What would it be like to hear good music again? A string quartette, for instance? How had he lived all those eight years, in reach of those joys, believing himself dead?

Possible to go on, if you can separate the streams of life like that, possible to go on grubbing, sleeping, if you can send your spirit out like a young goat skipping free! An hour ago, hopelessly swaying to a

'bus-rail, and wondering what kept them all from bursting out in rebellion. "Jammed and crammed in 'busses, and they're each of them alone, in the land where the dead dreams go!"

Maybe not the most beautiful lines ever written, but the most wonderful to him! Because of their effect on him; their revitalizing power; the solitudes they illumined. And then he came, slowly, quietly, to Isabel.

How soft and sweet she had looked as she said it, standing in her room of roses. "There's one that's wonderful." That one. The book opened there. She had read it often enough to make the book split to that page. Belonging to that bland brute! No, not belonging. That's the revelation. Belongs to herself.

Just thinking of her, and it brought her into the room with him, or as clearly as if she had been in the room with him. The tenderness in the eyes, the pretty, capable hands! If a man can do that by thinking! If that's what memory means! Life not niggardly, then, if one can think oneself into paradise! Queer, what was happening to him. As though the blood were beginning to circulate through veins long clogged.

Can one remember a voice? Hear it? Could he hear, in thought, that pretty, straying voice of hers? "Say it, all over again, Isabel!"

And she said it again, to his straining memory. Told him what she had done with her walls, with her roses. Told him that he was "one of us, masquer-

ading in Bird Place.” Told him that it would never be quite the same to him, London, if he read that poem.

It would never be quite the same to him, Life!

Wonderful, the finding of your soul’s wings! Letting them carry you out of your bonds, out of Bird Place!

Go back to Haberdasher Street, why not, and do it all over again! Counting, head down, to her door once more. And then: “The door is on the latch!” Glow from an open door, and there she is, Isabel! The girl who is going to help him to his discovery that a man’s soul belongs to himself. The sweet, un-English voice of hers saying: “You’re frozen.” Seeing her. Seeing her among her roses!

The crumpled cushions, the sewing basket with its work out-tumbling. Afraid to breathe for fear the dream will break, and break down it does when the door opens, for nothing else had she said to him after the husband came in; just minds understanding each other. So back to the ’bus again, and over and over the experience, to hear her voice, to see the pity in her eyes when she said: “You’re frozen.” Over, and over; and over again.

That’s the reason men can live; not because they sleep away, like dogs, the half of life. But because of that secret orchard, that locked up room to which one’s soul alone owns the key; the room that no one ever enters unless one bids him in.

Just because there had been an accident in the subway, and the ’busses were crowded, and the fog was thick. Because he was dizzy from standing and

swaying, and his counting had gone wrong. Too dazed to think quickly when the voice that did not belong to him—

Belong to him? Did it belong then to that smug creature who hadn't heard when her mind spoke to *him*, to the stranger? Belonged to him, any more than his soul belonged to—Alma? Her spirit, free, too. Free to come to him, in his locked room when no one else was by to mock or scorch with words. Free to come to his call.

Cherry trees abloom, ah, seas of bloom! Blaze of sky and blossoms falling! Standing there, wistful, tender,—standing there!

“You're frozen!” But that was memory. If her spirit were free, why did it not speak to him?

The dawn was creeping in the windows when the husband of Alma Graeme took his place by her side. One has to go to bed, if one must be seen getting up. One of the habits of the pendulum. But he knew now why men can go on living.

CHAPTER V

IN MEMORIAM

FACKENTHAL, head of the firm of Fackenthal, Knight and Company, Limited, importers of wool and goat's hair, for some weeks had been observing a change in one of his clerks, Graeme. He was walking differently; no longer like an old man; had spring to his step. He did not look beaten, finished; there was a suggestion of youth in his eyes. Other things, too, he had noted, which no one but Fackenthal would have thought worth recording. After awhile, when the old ways did not recur, he spoke to Knight about it.

"Have you seen Graeme lately, to speak to? Did you notice any change in him?"

Knight, fifty-eight, and finished, too, in his unsuccessful way, a self-satisfied, self-centred way, did not see changes. He heard threats of changes, and discouraged them. He liked things to go smoothly, as though on a greased track. What is the use, he would demand, of working hard half your life in order to get things running smoothly if you cannot enjoy the other half of it watching them go that way? Fackenthal, he complained, was a revolutionary, a discontent. He was always stirring up people, wanting to make them uncomfortable, or dissatisfied, just because he himself liked activity, no matter where it led! Restless,

rather; he had never outgrown that youthful restlessness of his! Fackenthal liked to call it progressivism, but it was youthfulness. Though he was only three years older, he always had to curb his partner's youthful impulses, to keep the brake on Fackenthal.

"Graeme? No." His tone, he hoped, disposed of Graeme. Bad enough, the fool marriage, which had wrecked his life, and his mother's too. It was bad enough, marrying her, spoiling his career, the chances they had given him, out there, but to have made everybody else uncomfortable by bringing her home! Whatever the story was, any one could see that that was the reason he came running home, instead of staying and making a place for himself! Boys of his age, alone, will get into scrapes, but to thrust his foolishness under the world's nose, to let such a person follow him home, expect the old friends to pretend that she's quite like other people, why, that's a different matter!

His tone asked Fackenthal if he could be expected to keep up an interest in a man, even for the sake of old connections, after a drab fiasco like that? Why, you could see what it had done to the fellow! It had dragged him down, to her level. After all the chances they had given him, what was he? A drudge. Finished. A routine man. Oh, yes, faithful enough, but weren't all the younger men outstripping him? He had no initiative, no ambition.

"Something's come over him," persisted Fackenthal. "I've been watching him. He's picking up."

Knight shrugged. He wouldn't say that he thought this was one of his partner's youthful fancies!

"He's gone out to lunch. I met him as I came in. Come to his desk a minute."

Knight shrugged again, but followed his junior partner. Fackenthal led the way through the adjoining room, his own, and through the clerks' offices, now deserted for the lunch hour. He passed on into the room beyond which Graeme shared with two others. That was also empty.

"Well?" Knight looked at his friend through his finished, incurious glasses.

"That's his corner; and his desk. The one with the flowers."

"Does that kind of a woman grow a garden? Roses?" Squinting, Knight approached the desk. "Do roses grow at Hoxton?"

"I told you that something's been changing him. I've been watching him. He's waking up. I thought he was finished, too. I know—we know. He was crushed; he didn't seem half alive. But he's straightening up. He's looking more like himself, his mother's son. These roses? Every week he brings in a few of them. Nurses them through the week. I've seen him changing the water. He's had that picture framed. It's a new one. That's Wade House, Mary Graeme's home at Surrey."

The two men peered through their middle-aged glasses at the house set in a quaint, box-bordered garden. The French windows opened directly on the lawn which ran to meet the encroaching shrubbery and old, overhanging trees. Foxgloves and delphiniums added spikes of beauty to the dense background. The photographer had achieved a triumph of filtering sun-

light which was streaming through the leafy shade and making patterns on the close-cropped grass.

Knight, who had been for several decades a prosaic grandfather, recalled that there had been something particularly pleasing about that garden. He had a vague recollection of a wish to marry the girl who had grown up there. Graeme, Fackenthal and himself, he remembered, used to spend most of their time in the neighbourhood of Wade House, playing tennis on the courts hidden by those trees, drinking tea on the shaded lawns, or behind those French windows, reading or talking with Mary Wade and her friends before she married Graeme, "the lazy curate!"

Much of this, however, had passed into the mist which obscures all unrelated things to men of Knight's type. He still yielded loyalty to Surrey because he was born, had spent his youth there; he still maintained connections with established families, but these were growing fewer. The picture brought no poignant memories. Had he married Mary, had she born him his four successful children, his youthful adoration had long since become a steady, more egotistical passion. There are not many fortunates among women who, though not permitted to inherit the name of Knight, may be allowed to mother it. One who could look lightly on such a destiny could not expect to be more than a ghost of memory.

Fackenthal picked up another photograph, placing it in Knight's hand.

"Mary Graeme."

Knight looked at it gravely, and long, a queer expression coming into his eyes. He was remem-

bering things long forgotten, memory achieving a poignancy—

“Queer, that marriage! Damned fine woman, and to have married Graeme. Good blood in him, but a hanger-on. Lived on her money. Lived it up, too. The son’s like his father—”

“The son’s like her,” resisted Fackenthal. “He could not help but be like her. She breathed herself into him. It broke her heart, that marriage. She fought death, hating to leave him, like this. That’s why I have been so persistent in keeping him—for her sake—hoping he’d come back to his own.”

“Dead timber,” repeated Knight, for the hundredth time.

“I don’t think so. I think it’s coming out all right. I must confess I was worried for a long time. But I’d promised her—”

“Well?” demanded Knight. That was always the trouble with Fackenthal, he thought. He would put sentiment into business. As though sentiment had any relation to wool and goat’s hair, and the daily routine of that sober office! Favouritism, familiarity, the habit of establishing with his clerks a relationship other than that of employer and employé, that was his partner’s weakness. He had to keep a stern rein on Fackenthal’s impulses. Where would they be now if he had given in to all of his whims?

His associate had picked up a few books which had been lying on the desk. “Library books. And those on that shelf are his. He bought the shelf, too.”

“Poetry!”

"Yes, but see these. Bryce on South Africa, Mills on the South African trade. MacPherson on the British domination in South Africa. The Boer War. Henry George. Noyes. Stephen Phillips."

"Well, what of it?" demanded Knight. A hodge-podge of books—poetry, political history, essays. Something was expected of him. He hadn't been brought in here for nothing. Fackenthal was up to some mischief. He recognized the signs.

"It means," Fackenthal paused as he replaced, carefully, the books and the picture. "It means that the man is trying to keep his soul alive. Trying to feed it, in secret. Why doesn't he take those books home? That shelf. He's making this corner his *home*. Those pictures, here—not at his house! Why does he cut his luncheon short to read here, as he is doing? Why does he come, at night, once or twice a week, with a sandwich for dinner, to read here? The janitor has told me. The roses, the pictures, the books! Ever been to Hoxton Square?"

"What do you want me to do about it? Move him from Hoxton? Establish him, with that person, at Knightsbridge? Bring her into her circle? We tried that once, you remember."

"First, I don't want you to consider him finished."

Another of his partner's foibles. As though *thinking*, having a definite opinion about a person, made any difference! Fantastic! What's a thought!"

Fackenthal followed him out of the room. "I want you to have faith in him. It's like a new soul being born. I want you to help him."

Knight waited to establish himself in his mahogany desk chair before inquiring what it was that Fackenthal was plotting?

"He's given me an idea. At least, reminded me of an old one."

Fackenthal, slender and virile, blue-eyed and grey-topped, stood in the centre of the room, facing Knight who was leaning back in his swivel chair, his fingers making a church steeple. It was his favourite, judicial pose.

Something new. Something faddy. It must be discouraged. Fackenthal had to be protected from himself.

"The place where a man spends half of his life shouldn't be a desk and drab walls, inside, and brick walls outside, and that the sum of it," stated Fackenthal. "Should it be a place which a man likes to stay in, or get away from?"

"It ought to be a good place to work in," returned Knight with firmness. "There should be nothing to distract him from his work."

"Do you do poorer work since your wife and I persuaded you to get some new furniture and a new carpet?" demanded his partner. "And you've a soft nest at home. It doesn't matter so much to you, or to me. But suppose you lived at Hoxton, lots of 'em living in places like Hoxton, or worse. That's where they have to go when we're through with them, unless it gets too fierce. And then, they go where they can't afford to go, but it's bright, and it suggests beauty—"

"How much have you figured that it will cost?" For he knew now what Fackenthal was after. He al-

so knew that his partner never spoke until his thoughts had crystallized, and then, unless it were too costly, it were far easier to capitulate than to argue with him. It was tedious, arguing with Fackenthal.

"Colouring the walls, painting the woodwork, doing the floors decently, a few framed photographs on the walls, a few books, about twenty-five pounds."

Twenty-five pounds!

"If you don't approve of it, I'll do it myself."

A nasty way Fackenthal had of hinting, always, that he, a Knight, was mean. All the Knights were large-handed. Of course, he couldn't allow him to do it himself. Nasty way, though, of putting the thumb-screws on!

"But books!" he objected. "The next thing you'll be giving the men a share in the profits of the business." The gibe was ill-advised. He would have recalled it, midway.

"That, you know, is what I've always wanted to do."

"I'll never give in to you about that," blustered Knight.

"I've stopped arguing. I'm only half the firm. I can't do that over your head."

"You couldn't do it over my dead body!" Exasperating to feel yourself getting worked up, knowing that the same thing happens every time that that topic is invoked, with Fackenthal getting calmer the hotter you get!

"Now, that's where you are wrong!" retorted Fackenthal. "Nobody will grieve more than I will at your funeral. Nobody will be sorrier, for I'm fond of you, Knight, or I wouldn't have put up with you for

so long, but the next day I'd reorganize, socialize the firm. And you know that, too."

The talk had taken an ugly turn. It made him think of those twinges he had been having lately. Nothing serious there, of course. It was absurd of Fackenthal to suggest death— He pushed the grim thought out of sight. That was a long way off. He thought he would go to the doctor's though, about those twinges. It was nothing. The doctor would tell him it was nothing.

"I'll go ahead with those repairs," finished Fackenthal, leaving the room.

"Of course, the firm will stand for it," Knight called after him.

He'd been firm about the vital thing, anyway. Fackenthal was always bringing up that subject! Why, the men were contented! They weren't asking for anything. What was the use of offering them something they did not know they wanted? Absurd, quixotic. It would ruin them; make them cocky. They'd be wanting immediately to run the business it had taken Fackenthal and himself a lifetime to learn. Not over his dead body. He was good for twenty years yet. Those twinges meant nothing.

A few days later, workmen invaded the offices. The clerks were packed, temporarily, into one room. In a day or so, they would have to be moved into the rooms of the partners. Fackenthal suggested that as Knight was looking a bit seedy, a few days at the seashore might tone him up. Knight decided to try the coast instead of a doctor. The offices were uncomfortable; they were crowded, and reeked of turpentine.

His wife was already at Scarborough. The worst would be over by the time he got back.

There was little of the old order when he returned, a week later. He expressed himself as grateful that his room had been spared.

"Good enough for a while yet," smiled Fackenthal, who looked as though he had been enjoying himself.

"For a while! It was only three years ago that they were done. They'll do a long time yet," he snapped. He had seen the clerks' rooms, but not the bills. He knew that twenty-five pounds would never cover it. He also knew Fackenthal well enough to know that his share of the agreed twenty-five would be all he would be asked to pay, so what use in alluding to it?

The walls were soft-coloured, the paint properly dull, the floors stained and polished. There were a few decent rugs; here and there a photograph, nicely framed; and two good etchings; one an artist proof.

They didn't look like offices where good, steady work is turned out. Who'd think that the sedate affairs of wool and goat's hair were transacted in those fancy rooms? Demoralizing, he thought, but he did not say so to Fackenthal.

"I forgot to show you the rest room." Fackenthal turned back towards the men's quarters.

"The rest room?"

"We've crowded the men together; I've put two in Graeme's rooms, and two in Gryce's. That gives an extra room. It's small, and it was always too dark to work in. Expensive, too; it always had to be lit." The amendment was adroit, and no one knew it better than Knight.

"And doesn't now?" asked his partner, sceptically, following Fackenthal.

"It's not in constant use. If a man doesn't want to go out to lunch, or wants to stretch out for a few minutes, that's all. It's small; really inadequate. I'd have got another room if there had been one. There isn't another on this floor."

Of course, he'd have got an extra room! For those "pets" of his. Ruins them. Just ruins them.

"Why don't you put in a shower bath, and a smoking room?" he inquired with heavy irony.

"Bully idea! I'll do that the next time you go to Scarborough," his sarcasm as heavy. He threw open the door.

It was a gem of a room. The reading lights were shaded; a substantial table was covered with magazines and papers; book shelves, with only a few books yet; armchairs, two couches, with cushions, the soft, inviting kind. There was an Oriental rug on the floor. Knight had never paid any attention to colour schemes but he did know that the room had an immediately restful effect. He'd always said that Fackenthal had missed his vocation; he should have been an interior decorator!

"Our club," announced his partner. "The men take to it like ducks to water. You'll use it, too, Knight. You ought to run in after you have had your lunch, and snooze a bit. It's empty then. You've got to take care of yourself, old man."

"Luxury!" snorted Knight.

"It's not the firm's luxury. This is my party, Knight. It came to me while I was doing it, why I

was doing it. I had Graeme helping me. He has taste, an instinct for the right thing, only he doesn't know it. It's a monument, this room. I didn't tell Graeme, but it's Mary Graeme's monument. She'd like that better than a slab which wouldn't do her boy any good. You'll never see the bill for this room, Knight."

Mary Graeme's monument!

Something stirred in Knight; the thought of flowers and moonlight. Flowers and moonlight for youthful lovers, in a Surrey garden, and then flowers and moonlight on a lonely grave. What was it that moved him? Was it the thought of his own death, or of Mary Graeme's grave in Surrey, or that stubborn loyalty of Fackenthal who, because he did not get the woman he loved, had never taken unto himself another?

Memories surging back! Mary's garden; friendships and fidelity; long forgotten sorrows; and death. He was silenced before Fackenthal, before Something Else—a faith men like to deny, or push out of sight, but which keeps men strong and true, and silent, and women, women like Mary Graeme, still and sweet. And at the end, as at the beginning, flowers and moonlight!

"I'd like to pay for it," he said, surprising himself. "I'd like to have a share in it."

"It's the best investment I ever made," gloated his friend. "I'm going to be hoggish about it. But you can add to the books, if you wish."

"I'll fill up these shelves," said Knight.

So it was left that way.

CHAPTER VI

IF I HAD A WIFE LIKE THAT?

GRAEME had been reaching out, as his employer had divined, for a place in the sun; towards those unforgotten, radiant regions where music and poetry and beauty can make even a maimed life worth the living. Stretched out on one of the couches in the den, as the men came to call it, he wondered often how long he could have pushed on without it? Just how long his renaissance, lacking the miracle of this retreat, could have withstood the grim facts of his existence? With a book hidden behind the newspaper in the sordid room by the empty grate, that his only outlet?

Hard to keep sturdy the hope that life is what you yourself make it, if you are locked in a jail with one who believes that you belong to her, and that life is a composite thing, you not even a divisible half of it, just hopelessly blended, identity left way back on the rocks somewhere, on that precipice where you and she took the leap in the dark together!

How long could he have kept up this fight against fate if he had not been allowed this haven? Behind his paper, waiting for Alma to get to bed; listening to her as she paced the kitchen, or marched about overhead; nerving himself against her tirades, nursing his own bitterness, how long could he have kept up the

farce of believing that he belonged to himself?

He had never dreamed of having a place to work in! He hadn't even realized, at first, what it was going to mean to him, having such a nest to crawl to! Like coming in frozen from the icy streets; one doesn't thaw out at once. Nights there were when he could not read, when he would lie outstretched, body and spirit resting. No resentful voice to dread; no steps threatening to spoil a dream or fading memory. He belonged here to himself!

The soft-tinted walls were a balm to the eyes so long sickly rebellious against the horrors of Bird Place. The pictures on the walls reminded him that beauty was not dead in London, although he himself had been so long dead to beauty. They had prompted a visit to the picture galleries, paid for in *time*, by going in his lunch hour.

He had an objective now. He wanted to renew his old acquaintances, art acquaintances, and to make new ones. They had been doing a lot in art since he had stopped looking at pictures. He did not understand the new things; he'd missed the successive steps. He felt like a foreigner before the modern canvases. He determined to know something about these new schools.

And some day he was going to steal an afternoon, and go to a symphony concert. Alma would never know. A wicked extravagance she would think it. But if such things give one courage to go on, give one courage to meet her, and an added softness to one's greeting, is it such an extravagance, after all? Wouldn't it be more extravagant to do without it?

Was that sophistry? Was he learning to defend his own wishes by proving that the result of the indulgence justified something which were else wrong?

Books were not so rare, now, since he'd learned the trick of the free library. But the clean pages of the new room, their intimate cosmopolitanism, like friends from afar meeting at one's hearthstone, delighted him daily. Easy for a man's soul to find wings in a room like this! Easy, when every one else has gone home, to pretend that the shaded lights are his; that this was his own retreat. He could almost believe in such moments that he was the man he meant to be. Pretend to be what he is not, by continued pretence might he not grow a little nearer to the boy she used to call "*My son*"?

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From afar, Fackenthal watched the working out of his experiment. All the clerks enjoyed the room, but one of them, Graeme, had acquired a different expression. Still wistful his face, but no longer beaten. It was the look of a man who is conscious of what he has missed. It pleased his employer to see him bask in the new comforts, not dreaming that they bore any relation to his mother. No one but Knight knew of the Atropian twist: that the room was a monument.

"Waking up," noted Fackenthal. But what was it that had impelled the waking? When a man's soul has been dying, for years dying, and his renaissance comes swiftly like that, what is the motive apt to be, a safe stimulus, or one to be feared?

"It may mean a different kind of helping," he speculated.

Coming in late from the club one evening, to get some papers his secretary had left for his signature, the janitor told him that Graeme was "still in there." Fackenthal went in, quite as it were by accident. He found Wade reading, a book spread out on the broad arm of the American made chair. Poems!

He pretended not to see a sandwich which was hastily covered.

"I'm glad that you make use of the room once in a while," commended Fackenthal.

"There was work I wanted to finish," stumbled his clerk.

"An hour at this time is worth three at any other," returned Fackenthal, shutting the door upon a "Good-night, Graeme!"

Poetry, yes, but Kipling's poetry. That didn't look mawkish. He hadn't yet discovered the clue.

The second time, finding him thus, Fackenthal gave the poetry reading more thought. Was the man drifting, or did he know whither and why he was going? He did not want to force his confidence, still he might be needing help, Mary Graeme's son. Maybe, it was very probable, he was groping blindly for a way out of the darkness.

Nasty mess, to be tied for life to that sort of person. The only way one can understand a man is putting yourself like that in his place.

"If I had a wife like that?"

He forced, deliberately, a picture of Alma Graeme, as he had several times seen her. Not bad looking. It wasn't a matter of looks, that is of features. It was more than that. Shocking, only, to one who has

known the Wades, who has sensed the sensitiveness of the man. Thin, her lips were; nose over-sharp; hinted that you need not expect sweetness or softness of the spirit back of the mask; hair drawn tight—oh no compromises, no gentle graciousness from Alma Graeme!

The name recalled the other woman: Mary Graeme, tall, slender, thoroughbred. It gave him now a pang, always, that he could think of her without a pang, that is calmly, with controlled regret. That meant he was getting old. He would like to keep the prick of loyalty, of loneliness; which means youth and passion.

Had his own graciousness ever been put to a more severe test than that day at Wade House, when the Knights and himself journeyed there in answer to the invitation to meet "my son's wife, Alma!" That stiff, impossible day! He had been glad to get away. The only time he had been glad to leave Mary Graeme.

The South African was misplaced, and she had not tried to hide it. She was not their kind, and she hated them because they knew she was not their kind. She seemed, even then, years older than her husband. What could he have seen in her? It was only a couple of years since their marriage, and she was already a sour, aging and graceless woman.

Mary it was, gentle always, who had told her guests when a chance had come, that Alma had been carrying the baby when it was far too heavy for her. On her hip. The Cape way!

"Alma is a devoted mother." He could see her now, saying it. She could always find the redeeming quality in any one, even in Alma, who so openly rebuffed her.

There was some mystery about the child. He himself had never seen it; neither that day, nor when he had journeyed to Hoxton Square. Twice he had gone there. Neither at the Knights', that last effort at friendliness, when for old connection's sake a weekend had included all the Graemes. Again the child was farmed out somewhere. "Fragile," Mary had told them. The Graemes had made it their excuse for being the first to leave.

Women would say that she did not know how to dress. She did have a savage taste. But it was more than clothes. It went deeper than that. She wasn't their class. She came of a rough, sullen stripe that he did not comprehend.

The Knights had vowed then to wash their hands of them. Perhaps had Mary Graeme lived, for her sake they might again have tried to bring into their circle the son's wife. But a year or so later that fine, silken thread had snapped. Gradually, he realized, they had grown accustomed to see Wade take his place colourlessly, mechanically, as a part of the machinery; the social, friendly relations forgotten.

"We have let him go too long," mused Fackenthal on his way to his bachelor apartments, after discovering Graeme the second time in the rest room, hunched over a book of poems. "Knight couldn't keep it up. It involved the women. Like mixing oil and water."

But he had no women folks to complicate things. Confound it, why had he never thought of that before? If he'd a wife like that, wouldn't he prize the minutes spent away for her? Was there any reason why the son of Mary Graeme shouldn't dine with him, with

his employer, at the club, once in a while? And without any offence to the wife. It would jar Graeme up a bit, would let him see what other men are doing. He thinks, maybe, that all other men are happy in their homes!

Because one has a millstone tied around one's neck, no reason that one should stay alone, always, mournfully contemplating it! Marriage isn't all there is to life, thank God, or where'd he be?

He would have to put that thought into Graeme's head, by one means or another: that an unfortunate marriage does not necessarily finish one. It's not the whole of life; should not be the test of life. It would take time, time and tact, to get it to Graeme that it is not a man's duty to stay down in the gutter with a woman who is determined to stay there. If not for his own sake, then for the sake of the proud Wade traditions, he would urge Wade to keep on struggling.

In the meantime, he would ask him to the club, he would get him in the habit of meeting people. He would prod him out of his shell.

Meeting him in the outer office one evening, he suggested, as though casually, a dinner at the club. "Just you and me. If you've nothing else on."

"I'm sorry. I can't, tonight. I've nothing else. But I didn't tell Alma." He was buttoning himself into his worn overcoat. The raw air from the streets ran to meet them in the corridor as they passed out together. "She expects me. I always tell her if I'm going to stay down, or, or—she keeps things waiting for me. I'm sorry. I should have enjoyed it."

It was finely done, thought Fackenthal. If one had never seen Alma, one would have been given a picture of a sweet, womanly presence; of a helpful wife, loving, and kind.

He looked away. Having seen Alma, it was easier not to be looking at Graeme as he put forward the pretence of the contented married man.

"Tomorrow night, then?"

They paused for an instant at the outer door which led to bleak and icy Fetter Lane. There was a soft flurry of snow falling; a few feathery scouts that might mean rain armies or snow armies before morning.

"Thank you." Graeme was turning up his thin, ineffectual collar. "It's awfully kind of you. I'll arrange to stay down tomorrow night."

"Can't I give you a lift?"

"I take the tube. It's just a few steps. Thank you. Good-night, Mr. Fackenthal."

From the window of his limousine, Fackenthal again saw Graeme, head down, making his way against the soft confusion of rain and snow. He was hurrying towards the tube, that he might not be late for the dinner which was waiting for him.

"Poor devil!" He thought he would enjoy the comfort of his machine, the warmth of his fur collared coat, if he had not seen Graeme.

"It will be snowing, before morning," he thought, looking out of the blurred window, at the crowds hurrying homewards. "This the rawest stretch of weather, between winter and spring." He pictured the club, its warmth and brightness, and again thought of Graeme, Mary Graeme's son.

Jepson, of the *Globe*, was leaving the club as Fackenthal entered the vestibule.

"I'm sorry you're leaving. I need good company!"

He liked Jepson. Jepson always kept things going. He wished Graeme could meet him.

"Why can't you dine with me tomorrow evening? A young friend of mine will be with me; I'd like to have you meet."

"Pleased," said Jepson. "Seven o'clock?"

It was a good thought asking Jepson, reflected Fackenthal, passing on towards the stairs. There was no one better fitted to stimulate a feeble renaissance. And it would need a third party to keep them off the shoals of reminiscences.

Great invention a club was! Where there are always gay voices, and the machinery is always in order. He must pull Graeme in, if he could. The man needed just that sort of thing.

An attendant respectfully halted him.

"Mr. Bolten's waiting for you in the library. He would like a game of chess, sir."

"Thank you, Hawkins. How's that sick boy of yours?"

"He's still in bed, sir. He's better; still eating that fruit you sent him, sir. Thank you for asking, sir."

CHAPTER VII

A CLUB DINNER

HE had not expected to enjoy the dinner. He knew Fackenthal well enough, he kept telling himself, not to dread patronage from him, but how could he help being a sort of social millstone around his employer's neck? Wasn't he out of touch with everything? Couldn't help showing that he was out of touch with everything and everybody.

What's the use of being shown what you may not have? Like dragging poor children around the Christmas shops and showing them what luckier children are going to be given. What's the use meeting men you will never meet again? Or if you do meet them again, it's years later, again with your employer, and they have met so many hundreds since that it's natural they shouldn't remember you. And then you feel like a donkey because you do remember them; remember them well, because of that one pleasant evening, so that their faces are like friends' faces. For you've been nowhere since. That one cud of memory to chew on, the evening when your soul stretched out and felt like an insider, like one belonging!

Feeling now like an owl, blinking at the lights. Awkward, to be a stranger in your own city! Not knowing any one, not nodding to any one. It wasn't so bad, that last time; going on eight years now. It

was all right then to be a stranger. You couldn't be expected to know people if you'd been in South Africa for three years. No one remembers any one for three years. *You* do. Because you've not so much to remember. *You* can remember even the things they said to you. Suppose any of them did remember you. Enough to ask: "Where've you been? Back to the Cape again?"

Suppose one answered truthfully: "No. Bird Place!"

His always the rôle of employé, following his employer. Only way he'd break into this place, slinking after Fackenthal. What had he come for, he wondered. What could they talk about? Surrey? Nice topic, Surrey! Surrey and the old home, that would be stimulating, to talk about Wade House which after his mother's death he found belonged to Fackenthal. Sold years before, he'd learned, so that he might go to college.

He learned about it too late to say he was sorry. It was like his mother not to tell him. What it must have cost her proud spirit to go to Fackenthal, to ask help from any one! His father must have been a dub, too. No one had ever told him, but he'd gathered that.

What else would they talk about? Alma? "And how is the child getting on? How old is it? Nine? Dear me. How time runs away with us!" What had possessed him to come? Going to have a rotten time. Like an owl; like nothing else but an owl.

Fackenthal was searching for some one, looking

around the long, oak-lined room. Every one he had passed had had a word for him.

"I'm hunting for Jepson; he is going to dine with us. There he is, now!"

They would not talk about Surrey; old times. He wouldn't have to watch for quicksands.

Jepson, discovered among a group of black frock-coated crows, was in tweeds, indifferently supplemented. He looked negligent, as though he'd dressed in a hurry, especially when he stood by Fackenthal, the most distinguished looking man in the room, to Graeme's thinking.

"I'm hungry!" discovered Fackenthal. "Shall we go in?"

As they entered the dining-room, Graeme had his first pleasurable anticipation. Good food; not burned! Old wines—he knew Fackenthal's taste—Rhenish wines, Liebfraumilch. Pleasant faces; nobody angry with you. Going to have a bully time, after all.

Proud, too, to be the guest of Fackenthal; proud to reflect that it was an old, established friendship. A fine, direct gaze he had! Watch him as he answers that question of Jepson's! Well-informed. He keeps up. He knows what he is talking about.

Fackenthal's mind as neat as his clothes. Never a fleck, never a hasty tie. Odd that you don't think of it when you look at him, that you never know what kind of clothes he is wearing! You think of the man; of those genial, direct eyes of his; of the fine, strong face with its bleaching crown.

One has to be in his office, day by day, to know that his method, in dress, manner, system, is unlike unfailing. Scrupulous about details; nothing sloppy or unfinished from Fackenthal. His facts all marshalled, carefully filed. Could one see into his mind it would look, he was sure, like his private office, like his own individual filing system, or his personal affairs.

His office disclosed his wide-ranged interests. Wool and goat's hair, that's the job of the underlings, the details of the business, to tabulate them, keep a finger on them. But the related things, human interests, the relation of wool and goat's hair to the rest of the world, the relation of Fackenthal to the rest of the world, those were right under his thumb, in his own room. He was never too busy to be a man, always, never the business automaton. Different from Knight. Wool and goat's hair in Knight's office, all right!

"I'm sorry! Did you speak to me, Mr. Jepson?"

Jepson did not wait for an answer. Jepson was insisting that England was rushing on her doom. "Look at the men she's raising; runts! She lets them be runts. She doesn't look after her men. Can she expect they'll love her enough to sacrifice themselves for her when the time comes? And the time's coming! It's *laissez faire* with England. If you've got a country place, or have friends with a country place, so that you can ride and golf on Sundays, it's good to live in England. But if you haven't—do *you* know any one who hasn't, or who hasn't a friend who has, ask him what sort of a parent, or host, is England. It's a dangerous game that, of *laissez faire*."

"The Englishman loves his England," smiled Fackenthal. Not easy to get Fackenthal excited.

"Is proud of England," amended Jepson. "Proud of her place in the world, of her relations with other nations, rather than of her relations with the man in the street."

Know any one who hasn't a country place? One pretty close. He could tell them something of the loneliness of the neglected seven millions.

"And not always proud of her," he found himself saying unexpectedly, suddenly thinking out loud. Jepson turned to look at him, as though to ask the reason why he, Graeme, thought Englishmen were not always proud of England. He couldn't say it in a hurry. It looked foolish, letting the sentence hang there. Had to let it hang, when it came to him, in a flash, who Jepson was.

Of course, Jepson of the *Globe*, and of the *Country Pictorial*. Jepson!

Had any one told him out there at the Cape that he'd ever be dining with Jepson of the *Globe* he would not have believed it. If he were the man he'd intended being then, this would be the opportunity of his life, meeting Jepson of the *Globe*.

"You're not so apt to challenge it, either the love, or the pride, in peace, do you think?" inquired Fackenthal. "That's the discovery of our heroic moments. A man forgets to talk about his love for his wife on baking-days and wash-days,—but let the house take fire, and he's as eager to save her as though she were the old-time sweetheart."

"It's not a good comparison! Suppose England a

large landowner. Charges her tenants rent, and forgets them the rest of the time. Doesn't care whether they have bathtubs, or breathing space, and keeps her lawn parties to herself; doesn't bother to ask whether their children have clothes to wear to school or not, or if they're growing properly. Now have your fire. That's a war, of course. The landowner suddenly remembers the love-tie between them, reminds them about it, sings to them about it, uses brass bands about it, until the poor wretches forget about the bathtubs, and the under-nourished children, and the lawn parties they peeped at, in mobs, over high fences; and they're willing to die, in mobs, babbling about love for the landowner, for if they are not willing, they're called traitors, and everything is in such a hurry, brass bands playing in a hurry, people marching in a hurry, loving the landowner in a hurry, that it's easy to forget about the bathtubs and the high fences. But some day, the man in the street won't forget; he is going to stand still and say, like Louis: 'L'état, c'est moi!'

"Enter the socialist!" beamed Fackenthal.

Jepson's eyes narrowed to slits. "Say anything decent or just, and somebody's sure to say: Socialist. No one seems to realize the tribute it is to socialism. Now, it happens I'm not a socialist, but—" Jepson was started. Graeme, listening, forgot that he had intended to remember his thin and shabby clothes, his long burial.

It was wonderful, listening to Jepson, to follow his swift, nervous stride around the world, as he pointed out ironies, injustices, hypocrisies. It tested his resurrection, for that's what it was, this feeble crawling

back to the light, his resurrection, his renaissance.

One couldn't understand the allusions if one were altogether a dub oneself; couldn't understand his lightning, glancing references if one hadn't been reading behind that newspaper, and to some account; if one hadn't been doing with a sandwich for lunch so that there'd be nearly an hour for reading,—best kind of eating, books!

What wonderful sort of thing was he eating now? Steak, but what kind of hybrid? Slit, and stuffed, with sweetbreads, that was it, and truffles, with a suggestion of mushrooms. One appreciates this sort of thing after going without dinner twice a week. Unless one would call a beef sandwich and a glass of ale dinner!

He was missing some of it, of course. But not losing much. Listening to Jepson and Fackenthal, and seeing too; watching the easy mingling of those other men yonder, who look as though they were happy at home. With nothing on their minds; as though they hadn't done anything which would scratch their name off the roll. Men who earn enough to keep their families decently—

Odd, the sense of heritage coming back to him! Of belonging to this class. This was what he had been hungry for. Not the lights, only, nor the satiny linen, the softly moving waiters, and the polished silver and crystal, though after eight years of Bird Place it was balm for his nerves, was like getting a glimpse of paradise. But to find himself still a gentleman, in spite of Bird Place, holding his own with gentlemen, with men like Jepson, knowing Fackenthal isn't

ashamed of him, knowing Jepson hasn't yet discovered what he really is, a rotter, a failure, was a surprise, as well as a comfort. He couldn't have done it last year. Couldn't have appreciated the talk. Last year, he would have felt as though drowning, clinging every minute to the lifeline. Instead, enjoying himself. A darting mind, Jepson's. Like a juggler who can keep track of a half dozen balls.

He hadn't forgotten his French, or he'd have lost the subtlety of that *mot* of Jepson's. But who was Masefield? He would have to look him up.

Jepson began to clear his mind of the Boer War. A page of history it was, he declared, which Englishmen would have to skip, as a lapse from principle.

Fackenthal did not agree with him. The war was forced on England. "You think England was in the wrong in '76. England was in the same position in South Africa that the American colonies had been fighting away from. Taxation without representation. The South Africans had been coaxing our men to come over and help them; to come over and do the things they could not do. And when they got there, they were told they could not have a voice in the government. But their taxes were required, all right!"

"What did they want to govern that country for?" demanded Jepson. "It wasn't the same situation, at all. They were all going back home! They were there to make money, and to go home. But the reason of the quarrel is not the point. It's the way England took to settle it. I can quarrel with a small boy if he's saucy to me, but I don't have to club his brains out! Not at this period of civilization. We used the

same appeals as though our house were on fire. 'Remember you love me, come and save me!' "

"Did you ever try to argue with a Boer?" began Fackenthal. Graeme could see him catch himself up sharply. "Well, if you think we've passed the war-age, you're mistaken. We are still in the adolescent, quarrelsome boy period. Remember how Germany evaded all the knotty questions at The Hague?"

"If it had only been one of her own size, like Germany," persisted the editor. "Oh, I know, I'm still a traitor because I did not shout for England then. A man is always a traitor who can see in wartime that his country is in the wrong. That's the sin of war; a few people can decide over-night to make millions of people traitors unless they pretend to think as they do."

"You were a hero at the Cape, Mr. Jepson," ventured Graeme.

"Not with Englishmen."

"With many Englishmen," insisted Graeme, feeling himself flush under that keen, monocled stare.

"He was there," Fackenthal explained. "At the end of the trouble, or was it just after, Graeme? He was there for the firm."

"How long were you there?"

"Four years," he answered, and instantly visualized Alma, red-jerseyed, hanging over the child's bed; saw their home, their dining-room. If any of those men could see him at his own table, wouldn't they draw the caste line? Wouldn't he, Wade, have done so a few years ago, before he knew how such things happen? To himself, even, it was a taint, the ugliness of his background, the sordid poverty—here, it was hypoc-

risy, hiding it, denying it, pretending that he was like the rest.

Jepson speaking to him; asking him where he had lived.

"Capetown and the Karroo, and once to the 'Vaal, once to Johannesburg." The last words were forced. That was the trip he had called his honeymoon. Before he made it. But never since.

"What was the feeling out there? Was Bryce fair? You've read Bryce?"

Concentrating that sharp, monocled stare on him, as though it really mattered whether he thought Bryce were fair!

Graeme hesitated. "Yes, in a way. But you can't get much personal feeling in a chronicle like that. No passions. And there was plenty of passion, pressed down, out of sight. Some Englishmen who lived out there took it as a personal grief, a personal dishonour. I wonder if you ever happened to run across a book called: 'Smythe's Diary'? That's where you get the passion. He *served*, did Smythe. Takes courage to oppose your country, away from home, in a time like that."

"At home, too. It takes something which feels mightily like courage. It's like swimming against a strong current, against the current of the ages. The passion war evokes is atavistic."

"There was Ffoulkes." Funny to *want* to talk. And to men like Jepson and Fackenthal. To have them listening to you, fixedly listening. Jepson who doesn't know you are a dub, a clerk in a rut.

"He owned more flocks on the Karroo than any other man on the Cape. We bought from him, the company did. He ran a paper, too, a weekly. He told the truth in it, as he saw it, he stood up for the dogged, trekking Boers. He was called a traitor. Yet he was the most ardent patriot I ever met. He had a big ideal for England. He lost his paper, of course; lost his friends. It isn't safe to be a friend of a man like that. His wife couldn't stand it, and she went back home. He spent every shilling he had, fighting the current, resisting. He's out there now, watching sheep. All he has left, his flocks. I think of him often, at night, watching his sheep. His friends who went with the current, with Power, making money, and out of the Boers! If the Boers remember the man who stood up for them, that's all they do for Ffoulkes, alone out there, under the stars, watching his sheep!"

"A good story, human story. I wish you'd feel like writing it up sometime, Mr. Graeme. Say what you think; for the *Globe's* free. The *Globe* is the stars, or the sheep, for this Ffoulkes, for Jepson. My Karroo. Hated, the *Globe*, but free, thank God!"

Graeme could feel himself growing, swelling. Asked to write for the *Globe*! Most wonderful thing that had ever happened to him. *Asked* to write! Would he!

First time his experience had come to him in the light of an asset. He'd grown bitter about the Cape. Nothing had been right since then. Yet here he was worth something to Jepson just because he'd been there. Maybe to others, then? To Fackenthal?

Opens a door, that thought! Of course, to Fackenthal, if he'd let himself open out; grow. He'd been asleep all those eight years!

Jepson didn't know his story, didn't know he had a Boer wife. He called them a sullen people, a few minutes ago. "Odd people, sternly religious, with all the religion left out."

Didn't he, Graeme, know? Old Krieger, the sort who'd burn and knife you if you refused to believe in the gentle Jesus! Rummy, that sort of religion. Alma's was that sort. She wouldn't miss church if she were so angry with him for being late that she wouldn't speak to him on the way! Said the blessing over the food scowling because she hated the one so who gave it to her! He couldn't understand that sort of religion. At Wade House, it meant a type or kind of living, of high, gracious and serene living; principle turned into daily action, into self control.

He'd often watched Alma at such times, wondering. Watching her listening with grim shut lips and lowering lids while the preacher talked of love and mercy to one's neighbour. Who did she think was her neighbour? A husband then not a neighbour? He must break this habit of thinking so hard; thinking so hard that he forgot to put an oar of speech into the talking current, once in a while!

Jepson and Fackenthal were talking of plays. He couldn't put an oar in then. It was beyond his depth. When had *he* seen a play? Not since he'd left London. If he should go to a theatre, he'd drop on his knees, thinking he were in church. For he had to go

to church; uncomfortable at home if he didn't. Not that he was afraid of Alma, but he liked things to be pleasant.

When one comes to think of it, his life wasn't much better than Ffoulkes'. Ffoulkes whose wife had left him to ride day and night over the lonely Karroo. Well, hadn't Alma? If he weren't riding alone, he'd like to know who was under God Almighty's stars!

If religion were true, real, wouldn't it guide people to live right? Would it leave Alma on the fringe, hating him, hating her neighbours, the shop-keepers? If it were true, wouldn't it give a few friends to Ffoulkes who had tried to see straight, who had wanted his nation to be a gentleman? Wouldn't it guide patriotism, keeping it fine, even if not gentle? What is patriotism, when all's said, but an idol, unless your nation commands not only your passion but respect? Unless *it* acts at least as well as the way it makes you act. What was patriotism, way back, but the worship of a national God? *My God*. God for Israel, and just for Israel!

Have we got much farther? "Love those inside of a boundary line!" when war's going on. That's nationalism today. It's expanded egotism. You can't put a fence around God, and expect people with brains in their skulls to believe in your godliness. He was writing his *Globe* stuff already! He hadn't written for ten years, and here were his fingers itching for a pencil because Jepson of the *Globe* thinks he can write a story! He wished he could cut now. He had to get his thoughts to paper.

He listened, pretended to listen to the talk about drama. He discovered, a few minutes later, as though suddenly, that it was late.

"It's never late," Jepson squinted up at him through his monocle. "Unless one is bored. No one is bored. Therefore, it's not late."

"I live—far out. I've had a wonderful evening, Mr. Fackenthal. I'm going to take you at your word, Mr. Jepson!"

He got past the other tables without every one turning to stare at him; the outsider, trying to feel like somebody, like somebody in a hurry. Some one helped him into his old coat, respectfully, as though it were the right cut, pretending that his arm had caught on a button when both of them knew it had slipped into the torn lining. What did it matter after an evening—like Surrey, like old times. And asked to write for the *Globe*!

He determined to make notes on the way home, to get down some of the story which had been crowding in on his mind ever since Jepson had suggested his writing for the *Globe*. Quivering as a captured butterfly, it was now, before being secured to the page! It would be ruined if he carried it home like that! It burned gas, to work at home, annoying Alma, whereas at the office—great idea, the new room at the office!

So one of the seven millions again, buffeting with the other six million nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine! Jepson had put his finger on the sore. Runts of men. Lets 'em be runts. Did England know that he, Wade Graeme, existed except when he forgot to pay his taxes?

Walking so fast towards the office, he ran into a woman who was turning the corner, and knocked her bag from her hand. He got a stare of rage from her when he restored the imitation leather horror to her, saying that he was sorry. A big, brawny woman, she was; wonder she didn't bowl him over! She was worth something to her country, or should be, and it tells her to shut up asking for a vote; to pay her taxes and keep her mouth shut. That's why she stared at him in a rage, a runt of a man who can vote. They are like that, the women of the London streets. He'd seen them in crowds, pressed back by the London police, and pressing up again like the invincible tides of the ocean. What was England going to do about it? Find more of those splendid police fellows? Keep on saying: "Shut up, and love me bye and bye when I need you!"

He must find out what they were all saying about it, the women, the socialists, the people of the basement meetings. Must find out where they were, the meetings of the discontents. He must find out what they were thinking; what they thought the trouble was, and what the cure.

The office building was dark. The stairs and landings dark. No one there but the night watchman, who watched him climbing the stairs. The newly installed electric switch at the outer office door released a flood of light. He went into the rest room, promising himself an hour. It wouldn't do to go home later than twelve, even after a dinner with his employer.

It wasn't like writing. Just being borne along; mind running away with his pencil. A flood of eager,

frenzied words! When the hour was up, he yearned to wait and read it, but he had to be starting home. It wouldn't be pleasant, going home later.

He stood up, stretching his cramped muscles. It was a jolly little room; he had an affection for it. It was like a home, the right kind of a home. Helped one to write, somehow, the comfort of it, the quiet, the shaded lights, and knowing no one was listening overhead. It surprised him to find how much he had written. All those sheets covered!

Life opening up! If he could write for the *Globe*!

He went to his desk, putting the notes carefully away. The roses were drooping. He replenished the water, and stood looking at them for awhile.

In the tube he made more notes.

Not Hoxton Square so soon?

Counting again. Two hundred and sixty to her house. If it were not for the habit, he'd stop counting. Something told him now when he reached her house. Window boxes up there? He'd never seen them before. Something new. Of course, she'd have to have flowers.

It would look like any other house, like all the rest of the hundred and sixty, unless you knew; had seen that room of roses, had seen her. Perhaps other women have a room of roses, maybe those angry-faced London women have one in their souls somewhere, kept out of sight, but opening up to something, a child, for instance.

Sleeping up there, Isabel!

A book agent. He had never had a chance to get her book back to her, or to tell her how she had helped

him. Like a man drowning in mid-ocean, clinging to a raft, fingers stiffening. Nothing but the fear in those fingers to keep him from the black depths below. Just a matter of time when his clutch would slip, and then those dark depths. When a light flared over the water. Said a ship was coming, help was coming. Do you bless that light? Don't you bless it? Feel like saying your prayers to it?

Rummy were he found there, staring up at her window! Didn't that curtain move up yonder? His eyes were tricking him. That house was as still as the rest of Hoxton Square.

Entering his own hall. Getting back into his rut. A rustling upstairs? Stillness only, a graveyard stillness. It was the echo of his own shoes he'd heard. Not right to disturb them because he'd been having a good time! He took off his shoes.

Tiptoeing, then, feeling his way in the dark so that he would not run into a chair the child might have left in the way; creeping up the stairs, shoes in hand, guiding himself by the rail with the other. Listening every minute to hear if Alma were moving; listening for her voice to demand what time it was, and where had he been all that time?

Creeping like a burglar up his own stairs! Not because he was afraid of her, but because he disliked scenes!

Undressing in the dark, grimly careful that nothing fell out of his pockets, or that his watchchain did not clink against his watch. Crawling into bed beside her— Not quite sure that she was asleep. Perhaps she was smiling in the dark at his caution!

Then wanting to turn in bed, but not wanting to. Not afraid, but not wanting to. Listening acutely to her regular breathing. Surely, she must be asleep. It was safe to turn now, wishing as he turned, slowly, that he had a room of his own.

How many hundred nights since he came to London had he wished that he had a room of his own? The child had. He'd suggested, once, moving the crib in here, and buying another bed. But he never tried that again. Queer, she didn't want it, too. Queer, that despising him, she didn't want it.

If you are poor, that is what marriage means. Never again a room alone; no meals alone, only a few meals alone. No hole on earth to call your own. What relation could stand it? Not even love could stand it—and when it's hatred—

We live too close, in cities, like London. Poverty, the crowd system, huddling, it's all wrong—it makes life that should be sweet, hateful. You can't live with seven millions, and expect a room by yourself, if you're one of the failures.

Jolly, wide spaces on the Karroo, that was living; having room to breathe. Ffoulkes not so badly off, after all. Having room to breathe. Not having to live with the woman who hated him.

Riding. Riding. With Jepson. No, with Fackenthal. Riding down Fleet street, on 'busses, crowded 'busses.

Streams of 'busses. Rivers of 'busses. A sea; a sea of angry faces. Wondering what you have done to them to make them all look like that! Crowds of faces, angry,—then wanting to turn—and then,—roses!

CHAPTER VIII

ON A PICCADILLY 'BUS

HE wakened with a novel sense of beginnings; of opportunity crossing his path. A momentous thing had happened last night. Would that chance have come to him if he had not been prodding himself out of his rut these last few months?

It began that night in the fog; a girl and her book had started it. He had been in the fog; a long time in the fog; since then as though the sun were trying to break through! Even that wonderful accident of the rest room coinciding with his feeble efforts—place for a muscle bound man to creep to, to limber up the ligaments of his soul.

Then she looked at him. Though his eyes were shut, he knew the instant she looked at him. It was the way she held her breath for that second of realization, remembering the stranger who was lying by her side. Watching her, wondering if he were really asleep—

He always knew when she stopped sleeping, before she moved or yawned. Her breathing then was heavy, as though she were working hard in her sleep. But she didn't snore. He was grateful to her for that. It was bad enough to be wakened many times during the night by the child's sturdy snorting. He often wondered if all children breathe as though over a

grater, as through a megaphone. He didn't dare suggest adenoids any more to Alma, it would bring tears; he would be told that he hated the child and that little Alma was all right, and just like other children; that she didn't need his interference. Poor little Alma!

He had long ago learned to keep his eyes closed when his wife awakened, to evade that shock of meeting glances, of appraising dislike. He could never grow callous to that scorch of humiliation,—lying by the side of one who hated him, accusing eyes surveying him! It degraded him for the day. The only way he could get through with it each morning was by pretending to be asleep.

If you keep your eyes closed while she drags herself up sighing, it isn't quite so bad. Even though you know she's there all the time, and she knows that *you* are awake, and only shamming sleep, it isn't so dreadful as your eyes meeting with a shock of sense and shame. Easier to keep them shut when she sits on your bed, on your feet if you've not slipped them quietly away.

She always sits on the bed while she pulls her stockings on; and shakes the bed, always shakes the bed. If he ever found himself in jail, it would be because of that helpless rage which shook him when Alma sat on his feet and dragged her stockings on. He hated her, then. There! He had known it would come, that feeling, some day. Revulsion, for a long time, revulsion, rage. But, hatred, that debases and enslaves one. And here it was, mastering him—

Sitting at table with her, twice a day; having her sit on the bed while she puts her stockings on; lying by

her side because they were too poor to have different rooms—what a half-man he was to endure it! For the lack of a little money, having to accept the soul-debasing humiliation!

He would earn enough to live as he wanted to. He would write for Jepson; he knew that he could. This shame, the hate would drive him to it. He would earn more money. If he couldn't earn it by writing, he would find another way. If money was the key which would open the door to freedom, he would find a way to earn it. A poor scrub to sit down and accept his slavery, his prison walls, if all he needed was a key!

Maybe extra work at night for the firm. Then he could buy another bed; yes, and another dresser. He would have a place for his own things. Not one drawer for him, and the other for Alma, that terrible married way! Always finding her things getting into his drawer by mistake, or because hers was crowded with little Alma's belongings. Finding flannel skirts with your collars, frightful flannel shirts, or dreadful knitted ones. Makes your soul creep. Just because you are too poor to get her decent ones. That's the answer to that. Though his mother was poor, their last years together, and she never wore things like that. If Alma would only stop shaking the bed!

She shuffled into the bathroom in her heelless bedroom slippers, and his fascinated hate followed her, visualizing the unloveliness of her morning preparations. He knew when she was mopping her face; he could hear her using her toothbrush as though she

were angry because she had to; could hear her coughing, her minute of morning cough; clearing her throat, and coughing again.

Hatred!

He could hear her shuffling back, and made his suspended breath regular again. He did not have to watch her to know just how she looked as she pulled off her coarse gown and began putting on, one by one, her ugly day clothes. He used to stare at her, hypnotized, before he learned the trick of pretending to be asleep. Used to watch her as she combed and brushed her thin wisps of hair, fiercely, as though they had done her an injury, and this berating were a reprisal. It used to hold him, awe-struck, watching her yank it all back from her face, squeezing it hard, in chastisement, screwing it into a tight, round knot. Like the London women, the ones you meet in the tube. You don't have to look to know just how she does it.

And then, at last, going. Ready, at length, and going downstairs. Thirty-five minutes after leaving the topstairs, breakfast would be on the table. Thirty-five minutes if the stove works all right, before the coffee would be done, and the porridge they always must have because they lived on Bird Place; because he was a dub.

Five minutes for a shave; five for a tub; ten to dress in, which leaves fifteen minutes to lie still and gather the courage needed to bring him to the breakfast table. Fifteen minutes to think, this morning, of his story.

It had seemed good to him, last night, as it came convulsively to life. Perhaps in the pitiless light of detachment, of later criticism, he'd find it was trump-

ery. He knew the disillusionment which awaited him. He could remember the dismay of his student days when he re-read something he'd thought inspired.

But even if faulty, things which are torn from you like that, which pour themselves out, as it were, are apt to have some life, some spirit. A spark in stuff which comes glowing from the furnace, passionate and incandescent. If the spark is there, it's worth being beaten into shape, blacksmithwise. He was willing to labour over it, again and again. Until Jepson was pleased; until he liked it well enough to give it space in the *Globe*.

For he couldn't go on like this. Curious, how one goes on, day after day, year after year, and then something happens, a little thing, maybe, nothing one can put a finger on, something which happens in one's soul, and it's all different afterwards; has to be. Because one cannot any longer endure the old ways, and live.

He was going to earn more money. Money to put away; his own. Soul money. Money to grow on; to grow free on.

Breakfast was not so fierce an ordeal as usual that morning because he had a plan to engross him. He did not glance up at Alma to see if she were more than usually angry when she thumped his porridge bowl in front of him. It surprised him to find that he did not care if she were angry. Distrust of his evening's work was disturbing him. He was wondering if he had forgotten to say this; or that. It did not bother him that the toast was charred; the toast was always more or less burned. Alma, he

thought, liked it that way. Vaguely conscious that she was staring at him curiously, that she followed him into the hall, and watched him from the parlour window. He saw the shades move. This, too, was different. But he had no time to think about it. He had some notes to jot down, once in the tube—

There was a blockade in the tube. After a short wait, he crawled out, and made his way through the crowd to the street where everybody was wanting 'busses. Every one in London seemed to want the 'bus that went down Fleet Street.

By the time he reached the office, his five minutes were gone, the five minutes which belonged to him. As he entered the vestibule, his watch told him that he was now the property of Knight, Fackenthal and Company, and there was no time to glance at his manuscript. Until twelve o'clock, he did not belong to himself. Not that any one had ever told the employés that they could not take the time to read the stories they had written the night before, but no one thinks of doing it, in a machine. Men come in; do their work; eat; work again, and go home. Their margins only belong to themselves, unless indeed *they* belong to some angry disappointed woman at home. And out on leash during their margins, able to move only so far from the office, leaving time to get back. That's business. Fackenthal, he knew, did his best to oil with graciousness the routine. The rest room, for instance, and the decent air he'd given the other offices, but time—oh, that's different, when you're part of a machine.

When it was twelve o'clock, Graeme slammed his

desk with a thud. Thousands of other clerks, all over London, were shutting down their desks at the same minute. The machinery of the City would be quiet for an hour. Men's margin. His story, tucked in an inner pocket now, would soon be telling him if it were good enough for the *Globe*; good enough for Mr. Jepson.

He had decided, earlier, to run around the corner to a little eating house where he could get a sandwich. He would bring it back to the rest room, and there read his story between bites.

He glanced in the room as he passed. A few of the other clerks had had the same plan. They were opening up sandwiches made at home. One man, Gryce, waved a sandwich at him. "Come along!"

Graeme made a gesture of empty hands and fled.

He changed his plan. He would take a table at the far end of the crowded room, always crowded in that cheap joint, his chair backing on the mob, and would read his story there. He walked up Fetter Lane, and was standing at the corner of Fleet Street waiting for a jam of 'busses to pass, when something pulled his glance. On the upper deck of the 'bus, smiling at him, Isabel! Isabel on the upper deck of that 'bus—

He slid between the 'busses, and grabbed at the hand rail as the 'bus was lunging off.

Watching every day for a chance like this, and he almost let it pass him! Mooning over his foolish story, and Isabel smiling down at him. The chance to tell her about her book—

She had seen him board the 'bus, and was waiting

for him, looking around for him when his head appeared above the stairs. She moved to make room for him as he approached her.

Not greeting her. Just looking at her. Matching memory with reality. As lovely, in broad daylight, as among her roses. At last, Isabel!

"Funny, isn't it," she said, "living on the same square, and never meeting. And then, here, the two of us, out of how many millions is it, seven? meeting in Fleet Street!"

"I belong here." He waved vaguely over his shoulder, still staring at her. "That's my roost."

"Oh where? I want to see it."

"You can't see it now. 'Third floor, middle of the square. Fackenthal, Knight and Company, Ltd. Wool and Goat's Hair!" He felt himself colouring with pleasure because she wanted to see the place where he worked.

"Do you often pass here, on Fleet Street?" Stammering, losing his words because he was thinking others so vigorously; thinking: How pretty you are with the sun shining on your upturned face! Soft, and eager and gentle with the breeze the 'bus is making, playing with your hair!

Then he wondered why *she* was flushing. Because he was staring at her; staring like a buffoon.

"I love to ride on the tops of 'busses; to see people swarming like bees. For all the world like bees. Lunchtime is my chance. I have to be at home, getting dinner, when the crowd swarms again. But London, going out to lunch! It's an experience, isn't it? Or do you get used to it?"

He hadn't thought much about it, that way, as being an experience, or a sensation. (Tender, even, about crowds!) But of course, when one comes to think of it, it is. "Do you see poetry in that, too?"

"I find it when I look for it." And then they both fell suddenly silent; wondering if each were thinking the same thing? For what was there to say? For those two people to say?

You don't blossom into instant speech with the person you've been deeply brooding over, though you have been watching for the chance, and though your mind is stored with things to tell her. For you haven't tabulated those items! You tabulate unimportant things all day for Fackenthal, Knight and Company, but not the things you want to tell Isabel. Having met her only once, having thrust yourself upon her like a thief run to cover in the London streets; when you've found yourself taking her part against her own husband, entering into a play against him, and when everything that's happened since you met her happened because you did meet her, why there is so much to say that you sit and watch her, dumb, your mind bursting with crowding, chaotic thoughts.

"I'd be afraid of it, if I did not make myself remember all of the time that I'm part of it, and like it." She turned to look down at the people jostling each other in their hurry to get the first 'bus up, or the first 'bus down. People thinking that that was their 'bus, and finding out it wasn't, because others got there first.

It came to him, as she kept her face averted, that

she had turned from the steadiness of his stare. It was raw to stare at her like that.

He wondered what 'bus it was they were on. And where they were going. Those people down there, all wanting to get somewhere in a hurry made him wonder about themselves. He hadn't looked to see. Had just jumped on when he saw her up there smiling. They were getting close to the Strand now. He couldn't go far, he must remember, for he had to get back. He could keep on going till twelve-thirty—that was the end of his leash. As for his story, it could wait for a day. And he could go without lunch.

He'd missed a few of those pretty, straying words of hers while her head was turned from him. It made him think of music, her voice. English, her words, but the voice wasn't English. Shouldn't wonder if there were some Italian blood there; those soft, dark eyes of hers! Or Spanish, but he thought it wasn't that. She wasn't the languorous type. Poetic, romantic, maybe, but energetic and vigorous.

"I like to see it all, as a panorama, the same morning, Bird Place—it's drab, isn't it?—and the women shopping in Whitechapel, and the other kind shopping in Regent Street. Just as busy living as if many of them were not going to have to die to-morrow, have to be run over by a 'bus, maybe. And then streams of 'busses—you know how they look when they come pouring over Ludgate Hill? And all the little clerks coming out for their lunch. Then after that, on to Hyde Park, to see the ones who have their feet on the others' shoulders. Some one said,

somewhere, that immortality was invented in order to give the mob the hope of putting its feet on the others' shoulders!"

Hyde Park. That was where they were heading. But he didn't care where they were going, as long as he was going with her. He liked to hear her talk. He didn't want her to stop, so he could have more to think of, at night, behind his paper. It would all come back to him, then, what she had said about immortality, and other people's shoulders, and about being afraid of the crowd.

She broke off abruptly. She was saying something about Hyde Park.

"Do you know, I don't know your name? It sounds abrupt, talking to you, and not knowing your name."

He said it was Graeme; spelt without the H, Wade Graeme.

She repeated it after him, Wade Graeme. It was pretty, the way she said it, her head tilted like a sparrow's, looking up at him. He might make something of that name if there were a woman saying it to him once in a while, saying it like that, as though he were not a bleak failure. Not such a bad name, Wade Graeme.

"Mine is Isabel. Isabel Blood."

He knew it was Isabel, the part which belonged to her. The rest belonged to that bland, thickset brute, and didn't matter.

She was still soberly looking at him. "I've often wondered what you made out of it, that night?"

He said, slowly, that he had often wanted since to tell her what he had made out of it, that night! But he knew she did not catch his full meaning.

"It was so foolish of me. My taking you for a—"

"Pigeon."

"And talking to you like that, a stranger. I don't talk to strangers. Just as though we had known each other."

"And not talk to each other, like that!" he dared.

She met bravely the daring in his eyes. Odd, how strong he felt when he was with her; different; capable; as though he amounted for something. He hadn't felt strong, or courageous, for many a year. That was the worst of it, of his life, knowing Alma thought him contemptible and mean. A man wants to feel strong. He liked to recall that he had protected her, that night, that he hadn't been a duffer, before Isabel; when her spirit had appealed to him, it hadn't found him wanting.

Ignorant, he had been of what he ought to do, and yet it wasn't badly done, after all, being done on the instant. At any rate, she hadn't been offended with him, or she wouldn't be sitting there, so friendly, smiling at him, letting him hold her gaze. Gratitude, being liked, being believed in, makes a man want to be better and bigger, makes him therefore both better and bigger.

"I've often wanted to tell you what it meant to me," he repeated. For he wanted her to know this. It was like a debt to be paid, this thing he had to say. "I was in a rut. I'd stopped growing, or caring about

growing. I'd stopped reading, long before that I had stopped reading."

Surprise widened her eyes. "You mean—I helped? How could I help?"

"I'd forgotten, or else I didn't know that there were roses in London, poetry. I'd got to be a machine."

Her eyes were not brown! He had never seen eyes like that! Grey, he thought, with a bronze veil. Brilliant eyes, yet soft. Gives a jolly, stirred up feeling when she looks at one. A funny little way of using them. Looks at one direct; questioning, balancing what one is saying, not like doubting, but thinking of the thing that lies back of what one is saying. Her eyes don't wander. It's as though one's thought met hers while the eyes are wondering, compassionately, if there are no roses in her neighbour's house?

Smiling!

Of course, smiling. He wanted to smile, too, remembering why he had to carry off her book. Got out by pretending to be a peddler. She was thinking of that, too.

"I have wondered how to get it back to you."

"I wish," she began, and stopped, then made a fresh start. "It would be better if you would keep it."

Afraid it might be remembered? He was keen, about little things? He checked up, did he? "Then I'll have to owe you another book. Later on. When I find one that hits me."

"Did this one *hit* you?" Smiling again, Isabel!

"It changed London to me. That's what you mean,

isn't it, discovering that you're not outside the seven millions, looking on, detached, different. That's what it did for me, gave me my relationship. Put me into the seven millions as one of the units."

"Oh, more than a unit. A factor!"

Nice little way she had of finishing a thought, of clinching it. Nothing more to say afterwards. A trick, it is, being able to say things like that, a gift. His mother used to say he had it. He wondered if he had quite lost it, if one ever quite loses it.

With dismay, he saw her gathering up purse and umbrella.

"Getting off here? I thought you were going to Hyde Park."

"Not today. There's an errand I promised to attend to. In Bond Street. I came out for that."

"But where in the world," stumbled Graeme, desperately, holding out his hand as though to stay her, "where in the world shall I ever see you again? To give you that book? Lunchtime? I'm one of those little clerks—"

Her eyes laughed joyously into his. "Hertford House? I'm often at Hertford House. I love to go there."

He had to let her go. But not until she told him when he could meet her again.

"At lunchtime?" he insisted. Still blocking her way, although the 'bus was slowing down, and she had to get on, downstairs. He had to see her again. Monstrous, not to see her again!

"Yes," said Isabel, and then he had to let her go, for the 'bus was stopping.

He had made her lose her crossing. The 'bus started before she reached the top of the stairs. She was lost to his sight until the 'bus disgorged her at the next street. He watched her pick her way through the two opposing streams on Bond Street, wondering as he watched what the errand was that she had to fulfill. For her husband, for the flashy, fat bounder. She said she had promised. His eyes followed her until the two streams engulfed her.

He rode on, thinking about her, and her errand, remembering the things she had said to him, the direct way she had of looking at one, when he realized suddenly that he was riding away from Fleet street, from lunch, and now that she was gone, for no reason. He bolted down the steps, and swung off the 'bus, just making one that was going in the direction of Ludgate Hill.

Time enough yet to read his story, and get a bite of lunch before one o'clock. He was thinking of Hertford House. He wondered why. At lunchtime. With a book for her. Masefield? That was the chap they were talking of last night at the club. He would look up Masefield in the library. And he wondered again why she particularly "loved" Hertford House.

At Fleet Street again, and only twelve-thirty. A table in the corner, empty, as he'd planned, and the Cape Story in his pocket. Wishing that she were sitting opposite. Wishing he could try it on her.

The edge of the writing adventure had been turned, he found. He kept thinking of a pair of grey-brown eyes. The way they looked at him as though re-

specting him, as though he were somebody, not a failure. By Jove, and he is going to be somebody! And this is the way to get there. So wake up, Wade Graeme, and get into your story. Back to your life-line.

It was a relief to find that his story flowed swiftly, like a river in haste to reach the sea. Plenty of rough bits; but boiling over the rocks, in a hurry to get its journey done.

Most people write as if they wanted everyone to remember that they are sitting at a desk, with lots of time to spend writing for folks who have lots of time to spare. But there is no time nowadays. It is all used up before one begins the day. Every one's in a hurry. In the tube, and afraid to get whisked past the station, or in a hurry at the restaurant, for the office is waiting. Books being printed every minute. Newspapers every second. Millions of books to be read. The British Museum Library to be read through before one dies, and being added to every day. People used to be willing to dawdle through volumes of words. But that was before books were being printed every minute—

If you want to be read, Wade Graeme, read and not skipped, you've got to promise on your first page that you're going to get somewhere soon. That in about three hundred pages you promise to get your passengers there, journey all done, and all talking about it finished. You've got to give them confidence that you can do it, too, or they'll get another driver. Set the pace at the start, and keep it up.

See what the moving picture is doing to the drama.

Jepson spoke of that last night. It had given him a hint about writing. The same people who go to the pictures are reading the books, aren't they? If you want that kind of people to read your books, you've got to get their confidence. They are not willing to waste time, for there's a good picture around the corner, a new book just out—

Faulty, ragged places this "story" had, but because he had dashed it off at white heat, he had achieved, he believed, a forceful, vigorous style. Not forced, but hurried. His way out, thank God!

Thank Isabel!

CHAPTER IX

THE WAY OUT

ONCE embarked on his trail caravel, new worlds opened up to him. So many places beckoning at once! So many lures to follow! Ideas which might vanish like smoke if he did not utilize the flame. Unrelated subjects; suggestions which carried him away from the *Globe* article. And he told himself, sternly, that he would not be carried away. For that was his immediate life-boat.

His story seemed at first too full; he had written impetuously, without restraint. As he rewrote it, it split up into several articles. He found he could not hold it all. And he reached the place when it was too thin— How much life has to go into a short talk about it! The thing became weighted again. And he began to prune.

He was a week cutting before he found that mere amputation would not do. He had clipped here, and chopped there, until the story was the desired length, but still there was something wrong with it. Time was his enemy, the time that belonged to Alma, and to Fackenthal, Knight and Company. As soon as he began, it was time to stop.

The hour came when he did not know whether it were good or hopeless. It became a mass of words, the form evading his eye. Deliberately, he turned the

key upon it. He promised himself that he would not look at it for a week. He would think of other things; he would write on other subjects, and would bring back refreshed eyes which could see it dispassionately. In the meantime, he would rebuild it, in skeleton; reorganize it; compare the new form, later, with the stuff locked in his desk.

Again and again, he organized his story, on bits of paper, on cards, on the edges of newspapers. He did it in the tube, in the 'busses when the hard-faced women on the platforms did not demand his seat of him. He did it behind his paper while Alma marched to and fro in the kitchen, or overhead. It was as absorbing as a puzzle. At first, his mind was not released from the written pages in his desk, but at last they faded.

For that week, he did not go to the office at night. Alma had become suspicious. She wanted to know if it meant extra work, this staying down town; meant more money, a raise of salary? Then why did he do it?

Though he reiterated to himself that his soul was his own, did he not have to make the motions of slavery? Accounting for his time, handing over his wages! Though the souls of slaves belong to themselves, does that knowledge mitigate the sordid fact of slavery?

It wasn't pleasant to discover that he was afraid of her. He couldn't deny it any more. No longer could he convince himself that his obedience came from a dislike of scenes. He was afraid of her tongue lashings; he was afraid of her power over him.

And she knew her power; his fear was one of her assets. He lapsed, that week, into the old servile ways. He told himself that there was no use trying to force his way out. If he earned more money, she would discover and demand it. One couldn't keep anything from her; she ferreted. She worked things out by suspicion. "What would I do if I were in his place?" Everything around her must become in time like her. One gets moulded into shape by her distrust. A horse's gait can be changed by riding him. She was riding him. She was changing his gait.

And this was marriage, in a free country. All around them, people were living this way. Men and women *belonging* to each other. Belonging means slavery, doesn't it? New thoughts rising within him were swelling to waves of revolt. Then it wasn't a free country. He wondered what people were saying about it, other bound people in this free land of theirs. What were the writing folk saying about it, above a whisper?

He was working free of some of his chains. He reached a point where he could think consecutively, without allowing entrance to black, accusing thoughts, while Alma tramped about, overhead. He felt he was getting a fresh squint on the *Globe* story. And pretended he was callous to Alma's stare when he told her that he would have to stay down town that evening.

The pages in the desk were not so bad he found. As paragraphs, all right, but the scheme wasn't right. It meant beginning all over again, meant sacrificing a

few of his pet paragraphs, meant mechanics, scissors and a paste pot.

His father's thin gold watch told him that it was midnight when he leaned back in his chair, the puzzle put together, the mutilated paragraphs mended. And on the way home, in the tube, he discovered the way to write a story. Rediscovered the formula.

He had gone at it the wrong way, hind side first, like a drowsy donkey! So afraid he'd been of losing the divine fire that he had let it burn him up, instead of using it as a torch, conserving its light, letting it guide him. Now he could see that a pen's fluency is not spoiled by cold-blooded organization, not if he has self control, if it be drilled. A plan first. Then letting one's self go, but not into formlessness.

He felt equal, now, to write for the *Globe*, for Jepson, for any one. He had known all this before, academically. But one has to discover a fact for one's self in order to make it one's own.

He found himself resisting the speed which was carrying him home. If he could only find a formula, a way to stiffen his resistance without making scenes. Now that he knew he was a coward, he couldn't endure it. He couldn't endure himself.

A question pulled him up short on Haberdasher Street: Why was it he loathed himself when according to authority he was doing right? According to law, to church rules, according to convention. Except for the *cherishing*, he was keeping his vows. Then why in heaven's name did his conscience accuse him of degradation because he went on doing it, standing by? Why did he slink before the image of himself?

A policeman came up and looked at him curiously. Graeme muttered something about having turned his ankle, and went on towards Bird Place.

What, he demanded, is right? And who makes it? And what's more to the point, who unmakes it?

First, he would finish binding those bleeding paragraphs together: any one who had been tutored by old Throckmorton would be sensitive to a mutilated paragraph; he would get the story off his mind. And then he was going to the library. People are writing about everything; some one is surely writing about this modern slavery.

Isabel's window.

Isabel, too, belonging to some one. Obeying, being shackled. Afraid to buy books, afraid to grow, both of them afraid to grow. He was going to find out what was the matter with it all.

CHAPTER X

THE BRITISH MUSEUM LIBRARY

TWO days later, he carried his neatly typed manuscript to the *Globe* office. Would he trust a precious thing like that to the mails? Suppose two, three weeks went by without hearing from it, and he would be burning to know about it, and reluctant to ask! Grilling just because he had not had enough sense to put it safely into the right hands. The only certain way was to leave it at the *Globe* office with a personal letter for Mr. Jepson. After he had left it with a superior youth in the outer office, he regretted that he had not asked for a receipt.

Trifling the notions for such a momentous deed! There was a consequent sense of freedom altogether out of relation to the fact. Turning in a story does not mean that it is going to be printed tomorrow, or at all. Yet it might be the key to that locked door which guards music, poetry, advancement, in short,—freedom. It was like buying a lottery ticket, leaving a manuscript to be read.

With these thoughts warming his mind, Graeme sauntered down the Strand. Leisurely, as though time were his own. The level sunset light brightened the faces of the men and women in the opposing current. Something was giving them an eager expression, was it hurry, to get somewhere, or the thought of

getting home? He himself was not going home; not so soon. Not this night! He was going to celebrate the turning in of his first manuscript,—the first one of this sober, mature period.

He was on his way to the British Museum. If there were any books analyzing the paradox we call marriage they would be in that library. But first, he was going to have dinner. Not a sandwich and a glass of ale, but dinner, in some cheap, decent place. He had enough tucked away to have a gentleman's dinner, if he wanted it badly enough, but it wasn't food he was yearning for. He wasn't going to eat up the precious savings that stood for abridged lunches. Every shilling counted; a nestegg for his freedom. He was going to buy a book for Isabel, though. He *wanted* to do that. Wasn't that part of his freedom, being able to do something for her without accounting for it? Ought to think of her as Mrs. Blood. She was that to other people. To him she was Isabel, the girl of the fog and the roses.

A wonderful sensation, sauntering down the Strand, the yellow light of the late sun greeting you, not twitting you that you are going to be late again for dinner! And having left your last story at the *Globe*! At Mr. Jepson's request, if you please! No presumptuous, unsolicited venture this. Not like one of the mob knocking at the back door. Yours the inside track, Wade Graeme's! Not because of yourself, but because the family had been the right sort, because Fackenthal was a family friend of long standing, and in a way a friend of your own through a mutual regard for proud traditions.

Like having old family silver; getting thin and worn at the edges, but standing for something, which new money can't buy. Like belonging to an exclusive club. If he ever got his foot on the lowest rung of the ladder he was going to build, it would be because of the mother who had given him the right to start, the right background as well. His father hadn't helped him. He was lazy, and impractical, selfish. Facts spoke. Nobody had to tell him. Neither her husband or her son had ever repaid her unselfishness. It wasn't fair. It could never be made up to her. Anything he would do now would be for himself. No use trying to delude himself by a mushy pretence of wanting to be worthy of her. Self preservation, that was the sum of it. Too late for anything else.

Life seemed to be opening up to him, as spring comes to a winter-locked world. Even the sun was trying to be kind; after its day of sulks, coming out of the clouds to bid a shame-faced good-night to folks! Admitting that spring was indeed on its way, and that it might therefore be in a decent mood tomorrow!

He paused before an eating house he had not patronized since his return from the Cape. He used to meet his old acquaintances there. That was why he had avoided it, he couldn't keep up with those fellows without playing the bounder, the sycophant.

Following the impulse for celebration, he ordered a kidney stew for which it used to be famous, and a glass of ale. It was a dish he never got at home, at Alma's home. Used to have it at Wade House, for Sunday breakfast. How the flavour of the sherry and the minced parsley brought back the breakfast room, the

pentagonal window with the bed of ivy below! Flowers on the table, always flowers on Mary Graeme's table; gleaming linen and shining silver, and his mother's face opposite, smiling at him! The French windows to the north, opening on the lawn, his dogs frolicking there. The sweet, planned sequence of flowers, bulbs, lilacs, roses, stocks, geraniums, chrysanthemums; a faithful calendar her garden was!

The graciousness of life, that was what he was hungry for, roses draping the poverty. He needed that almost as much as being believed in.

After an unhurried dinner, he looked up the books on marriage. He discovered that hundreds of unhappily married people—for if you're happy you don't bother about it, do you, take the time away from it to write about it?—were spilling over into ink and paper. It was amazing, and rather overwhelming. France and Germany had a good deal to say about it.

He did not know where to begin. He plunged, choosing names which pleased him, or had some meaning for him. An astonishing *mêlée* of disillusionment. He would be ready to die before he got through reading, before he had discovered which was wrong, law or instinct. What did he want to know particularly? He must lesson that habit of diving into midstream. He should organize his curiosity—

Marriage in England? Pretty general, and dull, but he supposed he should read at least one such survey. *Marriage a Sacrament*. Surely that! *Marriage Laws?*

A bored looking young woman at the desk had ac-

cumulated another dozen or so more books for him, books he had requested. After an hour's delving, he was convinced that he was still attacking the subject in the wrong way. What he was searching for was some light on the failures; why people want to crawl out of it, and can't; or why they don't want to crawl out. He wondered if it were not *Divorce* he should be pursuing?

Not that he was contemplating that solution for himself. Nothing Alma had done had given him cause, for divorce in England. Marriage is holy, even if it's a failure—

Funny, one finds out about it, after one's in. If one were going into business, one studies the business, prepares for it. If one plans incorporation, one finds out about corporation laws. One tumbles into marriage, which is final, the only final institution, which is so holy that one has to sin to get out of it, but if the other party to the bargain sins too, then neither can get out of it. Logical? Reasonable? Must be, or England wouldn't pay a man to resist all claims for divorce. He approached the bored custodian of books with a list of imposing names on *Divorce*.

It was ten o'clock before he had compiled a list of books which he was going to try to find in the other library, nearer the office. Laws on Divorce. Laws on Marriage. It wasn't what he wanted, but he was going to begin at the foundation. He wanted to know why one loses his freedom. Has it always been right, slavery, is it always going to be? Who are the rebels, and what is their creed? He was still on the wrong track.

He would have to appeal again to that superior young person with the paper cuffs pinned over her sleeves. And what was he going to ask her?

As to the decent revolters? No need to ask about the other kind: any one who lived with eyes half open knows about the other kind, pretenders and victims. He felt a little shy about going back to her. He must have a reason for his persistence. Once, at a moment's notice, he had been a book agent. Well, he would be a reporter now.

He returned his load of books. "I'm afraid these won't do. I'm a reporter. I've a divorce story to do, and want to get a background for the case, historical; much at sea, I'm afraid. These are some of the points. Can you help me?"

Her first glance at him was reproachful. As though intimating that a newspaper man ought to know just what he wanted. She looked at the card neatly tabulated by one who had spent years tabulating. He saw a gleam of interest creep into her dark eyes.

"Of course, you've read Shaw. There's a new book that will help you, rather new. Not only on your subject. The author discusses marriage from a new viewpoint. He gives a good bibliography, too. You will find there all the references you need." She swept up his discards, and placed them on the wheeled table behind her. "You did get into deep water!"

She seemed human; no longer the automaton. She was gone several minutes. Graeme was watching the other patrons of the library. She brought back one fat volume.

"I'll make out a list for you tomorrow, if this won't do. But I'm sure it is what you want."

Graeme was sorry, but he couldn't come back tomorrow!

Of course, if he were a reporter, he wanted his information at once. "Going to stay late?" she inquired.

"Rather late."

"If you come back in an hour, I'll try to have it ready then."

Because of all the trouble he had given her, he went back for her list. But it was not necessary. That fellow who had written *The Ways of Men* had promised already to give him what he was after. Not drily or statistically, not as twaddle, dogma, or prophesy. He gave facts; the evolution of the institution he traced, giving dispassionately its virtues and drawbacks, its limitation. He approached the subject of the relationship of man and wife as he treated other relationships, scientifically.

Graeme told himself that if he could not find this book in the circulating library on the Strand, he would buy it. This man was going to tell him why marriage had become the thing it was.

The librarian was no longer bored; she showed an interest in the reporter who was floundering in his deep waters. She asked which paper he wrote for. Shamelessly, he acknowledged the *Globe*.

"If it's decent, I'll bring it to you." He put carefully away in his notebook the list she had made for him, and made his way out into the street.

The sky was bright with stars; frosty stars. It had turned colder. It would probably snow before morning.

As he left Haberdasher Street, he saw a light in one of the houses in the square. An upper window. Near his own house. He thought that it might be Isabel, reading late. As he drew near, he was surprised to find that the light came from his own house. Perhaps little Alma were ailing again. Would Alma take it into her head to wait up for him?

As he let himself into his hall, he could hear her step, on the floor above, hurrying. She did not hear, or did not stop to challenge the opening door. Graeme stood for a moment deliberating.

It was late to read, and he was tired. It was unpleasant to go up before she was asleep, or at least pretending to be asleep. He went into the dreary parlour, and turned on the regulated burner.

The light was reflected from something bright in the window corner. A stick, a gold-topped walking stick. He picked it up and examined it. Smooth, high-polished, the gold top flashily engraved. It looked like the Cape. Some one from the Cape had been there to see him? Or to see Alma. Why not to see Alma?

The newspaper that night did not hold his attention. He was wondering who had been there. In most houses, men and women come freely to exchange friendly gossip and news. But no one ever came to his house. Alma did not like it. Not for many years, not since their first year there had any one ever come to see them. If Alma were awake when he went up

to bed he would ask her—no he would rather ask her in the morning!

It was the sort of stick that man Blood would carry, but he wouldn't come to that house. There was no reason. Still, he was curious—

Presently the noises above died away. He read for a while longer, finding himself too sleepy to take in what he was reading. Then he looked over the list the book guardian had given him. Hard to keep awake tonight. He couldn't stay awake any longer. He wished he had a room of his own.

Trying to walk as though the house belonged to him, as though there were no reason why he should not be getting home after midnight, he went upstairs. Alma was simulating sleep. Pretending that he thought she was asleep, he got ready, noiselessly, for bed.

The next morning, while she was at her stockings, it occurred to him to ask about the gold-headed cane. He opened his eyes, asking her instead if any one had been there the evening before?

"Here?" countered Alma. "Nobody ever comes here."

Maybe she did not know that the stick had been left. He did not want to catch her in a story, or seem to be spying. She did not want him to know that any one had been there.

"Did you expect any one? Why should any one come?"

He said, that he did not expect any one. No, there was no reason why any one should come.

"It did not seem *likely* that you expected any one

to come and see you *here* when you said that you had to stay down, to work," accented Alma.

"I saw your light. It was burning when I came home."

He thought that she looked confused. It was only for a second. "The child was restless," she said. "I had to get up to quiet her."

No evasion. A deliberate lie. For hadn't he heard her walking around the room, with her shoes on? She did not put her shoes on when she got up to quiet little Alma. Some one had been there, and she did not want him to know. That was her right, to have guests, friends, even if she chose to lie about it. He wouldn't be curious, even, if the idea of Blood had not come into his head.

He listened after her as she went down the stairs. As he knew she would, she went directly to the parlour. He heard her crossing the room, and then standing there, looking about her, walking over to the window, and picking up the walking-stick and wondering if he had also discovered it.

He heard her move on to the dining-room, and into the kitchen. Then came the unholy racket of the kitchen stove.

When he went down twenty minutes later, the stick had disappeared. Alma told him that she was sorry the toast was burned. And was the coffee too strong?

Fancy Alma saying she was sorry about anything! or even mentioning the burnt toast!

Thoughtfully, he went off to the day's work, passing the Bloods' house without an upward glance. Several times during the day he thought of the stick.

CHAPTER XI

HERTFORD HOUSE

THREE times during the following week, Graeme went prowling through the rooms at Hertford House, foregoing his lunch in the hope of meeting Isabel. Twice he risked being late at the office, waiting and searching for her, vainly. He knew that she would come when she could. It did not occur to him to doubt her, or to suspect coquetry. The third day, just as he was beginning to despair, to realize that he might go there five days out of six, to miss her on the sixth, he came upon her, in the room of the Murillos.

She was leaning over a railing when he caught his first glimpse of her, not looking at pictures, her gaze intent on a French table, or on one of the objects exhibited there. He stood for a minute, watching her.

What was it that was so fine, so special about her? Gentleness? Not humility. The gentleness that fears to wound people, gentleness that would enfold a city waif. He wanted to stand there, watching her; cataloguing all the delicious little charms of face and feature: the way she carried her head, a special distinction, the way she carried her head; the soft flying colour in her cheeks; the way the hair grew around ears and brows ever so slightly waving. Then the way she had of looking at things, just as she looked at

people, as if demanding the whole of their meaning. That was her personal note, he thought. He had never seen any one who looked tensely, yet gently, the way Isabel did. He could watch her all day, discovering new charms, daintiness of touch, the soft way she breathed, but his time was flying; and he wanted to talk with her.

He came up behind her. "I've been wondering what it is that absorbs you so?"

Joy ran into her eyes. They betrayed her. They told him how glad she was to see him, that she, also, had been despairing of meeting him; told him what a lonely child it was! Childish she looked that minute, confessedly, openly glad!

It was wonderful to discover her pleasure. He had been counting over their meetings, as a miser his coins; it had not occurred to him that she, too, was valuing them; that she, too, was starving!

Her eyes had to fall at last before his. "It's my game," she confessed. "I always play it here, and at the museum. I won't look at catalogues until I make up my mind what things are. I look at the furniture, and say: 'Yes, this is Quatorze.' Or this—'Seize.' "

"And it is."

"Yes! Almost always! I don't know why. But I am going to know. That's what I'm trying to find out, now, why I know. I'm going to begin to study historic furniture, to know why I know, what are the exact differences."

"You're sort of a witch, aren't you? A sixth sense." Such a lonely life, hers. Playing games with

herself, and with her roses; with the furniture which had been the properties of kings and queens!

"It's a sense, or sympathy, a person has for certain things, the things they like, isn't it?" Wonderful to have any one who looked like Isabel appeal to you, as though you knew something! "Some men, I suppose, know guns that way. Some women know clothes, a mile off. This year, those shoes; last year, those hats. But furniture, French furniture!" She clasped her hands in a manner indubitably French. In that instant she revealed to him her nationality.

"You are French?"

"My mother was. My father was English. I cannot remember him, I was so young when he died. I suppose it was because of not knowing my father, and my mother's loneliness in the land which was foreign to her, that made me feel French. Though I have lived in England all my life. To mother, the English were always strangers. We always had a few French friends, until we moved to Annersley. I am related more to a land I have never seen, to France, to its music, its literature, its furniture, than to the England I know. I love everything that is French."

"French plays?" he suggested, to bring that flash again into her eyes.

She did not answer at once. Then she said she did not often get to a play. Once she *had* seen Bernhardt. Oh, she would never forget that wonderful time. Bernhardt in *L'Aiglon*. She had forgotten to breathe. But what did Mr. Graeme think about it. *Was* it so wrong to want to see an actress like Bernhardt?

"Do we go to see the woman? Isn't it the actress we go to see? I have never bothered about that. I've seen her only twice, but that's because I can't afford to go to the theatre," acknowledged Graeme.

It sounded stupid, and vulgar, his confession. Why he should want her to know the truth about himself, that he was poor, he could not explain then to himself. Only that the wish was there, that she should know the truth about himself. Only a common little clerk. He had tried to impress that upon her the day in the 'bus. But her eyes, her manner, insisted upon deferring to him, as though paying him a subtle sort of respect; as if she thought he were a person of importance. He wasn't anything, unless it were a failure, an ordinary clerk.

On the brink of a talk with her, the first real talk they had had, and he had to pull out his watch to measure his leash; to see if it were time to be turning into a machine again.

"Shall we walk through?" she asked him. "There are good things here. Quite as good as the Louvre, Mother used to say."

He knew that, today! He had been reading up since his last talk with her. He had been to Hertford House many a time, but without establishing a personal relation. He had had to turn to guidebooks to find out why she loved it. "He would have thought she would like the Turners of the National Gallery, and the Rossettis."

"I do like them. But I love this," explained Isabel. "I belong to this."

They looked at French furniture for a few

minutes, bending together over the intriguing descriptions. Graeme looked again at his watch.

"I have to go," he blurted. "I'm late now. And this is the third time I've been here, hoping to find you. Can't you, would you be willing to say which day you will be coming back? So that I will not miss you? I've only an hour at lunchtime. Sounds as though I were a rotter, asking you!"

She did not answer at once, and he was afraid that he had offended her.

"I suppose you are very busy? That it is hard to get away?"

"Oh, it isn't that. I'm not busy. I've only two meals to get. I make my own clothes, and my hats; and I read, and walk in the park, and sometimes ride in the 'busses. But I have oceans of time left, always," exclaimed Isabel.

"Then can't you? We've always met like this. Just beginnings. I'd like to have you show me Hertford House."

"I'd love to. All my discoveries!"

"When?" demanded Graeme. "Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow? Oh, not tomorrow!"

"You just said that you were never busy," persisted Graeme, wondering meanwhile at his own daring. But if there were a chance to see her tomorrow, he was going to force that chance, that was certain.

"I'm not, but,"—

"There is no *but*. I'm going to be here tomorrow. And if you are not here, I'm coming back the next day, and the next. And I ought to be—"

"Ought to be—what?" And her intent gaze was turned full upon him.

"I'll tell you what I ought to be doing, tomorrow!"

Just like a boy he felt; joyous and prankish. She made him feel that way. She threw him back into his youth. "Say tomorrow!"

And Isabel said: "Tomorrow!"

He tore himself away from her. Strangely excited and elated. Tomorrow! Going to see her again tomorrow. To talk with her, to tell her about his writing; about his dreams. Of daring to begin over again; at his age, as though young. Because she had given him courage. Afterwards, if there were time, she would show him her treasures. But there was plenty of time ahead of them, days to be good to them.

They were going to talk tomorrow!

CHAPTER XII

LILAC-TIME IN LONDON

NEVER had it taken today so long to turn into tomorrow! The afternoon dragged as though weighted, the evening hours at home carried chains. He pretended to read behind his paper, pretended to himself he was reading. When he discovered he did not remember a word he had read, he faced the self-deception, and abandoned the pretence, letting his mind rove among the things they would discuss the next day: his debt to her; his ambition; and how sorely he still needed help.

To find out, too, if he could without wounding her, or without giving her the wrong impression of his friendliness, if there were not some way he might repay her, if he might not be of some service to her. He could not speak of her loneliness unless she acknowledged it. But she was lonely, she had betrayed that, inadvertently, he felt sure. Surely, there must be something he could do for her!

Though they had not agreed as to the place of meeting, he took it for granted that it would be in the same place, in the room of the Murillos. He had hurried off, without asking her, knowing he was going to be several minutes late at the office.

He found her there, near the Murillo, looking at her furniture, but listlessly, he thought. Her interest

seemed divided. He could see her turning to look at the people who passed. The welcome she gave him was genuine enough! It ran to meet him. She was lonely, all right, Isabel was!

There were not many people in the rooms through which he had passed, all but the guards beginning to think of luncheon, and hurrying past, and out. Two women were standing in front of the Murillo, close to Isabel. Because of them, he walked up to her, greeting her as an old friend whom he had not expected to meet, and shaking hands with her. The first time he had shaken hands with her. Nice, cosy sort of habit it is!

"Can't we sit down for a few minutes?" he urged. And when they were seated: "Before you begin to educate me! Time runs away so fast when I am with you. I wonder would you mind not looking at furniture today?"

He remembered afterwards how soberly she had looked from him to the Holy Family, and then back to him again. Without speaking; the gentle, penetrating glance upon him, waiting.

"We can't pretend we are like other people, can we?" It was the beginning he had planned behind his newspaper the evening before while Alma was marching about overhead. But he had not dreamed that it would cost such a physical effort. His face turned blood red. He felt as though he had been drinking. Surely, she would think he had been drinking. It was as though all the blood in his body were in his face. His heart thumped disagreeably. It was, he told himself, because he had lost the knack of

talking about himself. Not since his pre-adolescent days, when he came to think of it, had he talked to any one about himself. He'd shut up, then, even to his mother. He had never had occasion since to open up to any one. Like other people? Surely, he wasn't. His habits had made a prisoner of him.

Her eyes were questioning him, but not challenging his route.

It was sweet of her not to notice his embarrassment. It ought to give him the will to go on with it. He wasn't prepared for this astounding confusion which was shackling his tongue. Here he was, sitting beside her, this his yearned for opportunity, and he was dumb, palsied. No experience at the Cape, in London, helped him to measure it. It was like his boyish agonies in Surrey, when a roomful of people looked at him to hear what he was saying, and then paralyzed with self-consciousness! But it wasn't that now. He didn't want her to misunderstand him—

"We didn't even meet the way other people do." This he planned to say, but why? Then what?

"I've thought of that," she responded, with a little rush of eagerness. "I've often thought of that."

If she had often thought of it, then she would surely understand what he was trying to say.

"My life has been different, I think, from other men's. You were telling me yesterday about yours, different, too, I think. Mine, for years it has been grey. Like a stone wall I could not see through, and hadn't the grit to climb over. I had given up trying. Until the night I met you. That night, I can't tell you what it meant to me, for I can't make you see what I

had got to be. I don't want you to misunderstand me—I'm so afraid you are going to misunderstand me!" For it seemed to him then that her eyes were asking him something, imploring him not to say anything which would spoil it all, which would make it difficult for her to meet him again.

"Other people would misunderstand," he stumbled. "But with us, it's different." He saw the beseeching look pass from her eyes. "I'd got into ruts. I was just a routine man. Oh, it was all my own fault. I'm not blaming any one, because I had given up trying to see through the wall, too big an ass to remember I could climb over it."

"And you are—fighting now, again." Not asking him, but stating it.

"Yes, I'm fighting. What you said, what your book said to me, too, it all started the old thoughts and dreams stirring. I began to think I might yet do the things I had once hoped to do. To be the man I wanted to be. I believe it is not too late."

"It's never too late," breathed the girl, her hands clasped tight together. "It's never too late."

"You saved me. I've been wanting to tell you this, when I had time, so you wouldn't misunderstand me. Not since my mother died had anything wakened me. I was walking in my sleep. You make me think of her. Though you are so French, as I can see now, yet you always make me think of her, of Surrey mornings, spring mornings when the lilacs are coming out—"

"They are coming out now," she reminded him.

"Yes, in Surrey!" And then he told her, still halt-

ingly, so long since he had poured out himself to any one, of Jepson and his offer; of the story he had written—she knew, didn't she, that the newspapers call an article a "story"? And did she know what it would mean to him if he could write well enough for the *Globe*? And he thought that he had done it. And if he had, it was her work, not his.

"I'm so proud!" she cried. "But I don't deserve it, the credit. It was just an accident. It would have happened anyway."

He could not tell her the whole of it, why it would not have happened, anyway. Not of the dreariness of his home; that would drag in Alma, he wasn't going to drag in Alma. He couldn't even tell her of the help the room at the office had been, what that had meant to him. That would confess the sordid ugliness of his home, would accuse Alma—

"No," he denied. "It wouldn't have happened anyway. And then, I had been rebelling at Bird Place. It stood for the failure I was," he had pulled himself back just in time from saying "all the mistakes I had made." "It was the prison I had built for myself, and for my—family. It's my—cage." His rueful smile asked pardon for his poor little joke. "But the other night, I realized—I was going home late, after a wonderful time in the library, an orgy of books, you know the feeling?"

Oh, yes, she knew that feeling!

"It rushed over me as I turned into our street that it was Our street. That if I had never gone to the Cape—" he stopped, aghast. He had not meant to say that. "If I had not gone to Bird Place after

coming back from the Cape, I meant, that I'd never have met you. And I was glad—for the first time—"

"Are you?" she asked. "Are you?"

Graeme had gone white. His excitement had passed, his flurry. He had said what he wanted to say to her. And she had not misunderstood him. "Glad—thankful to be there, because you are there, while you are there."

Oh, she would be there. She would always be there!

"Is it possible for a man and a woman to keep a friendship, like this? Is there anyway I could do anything for you—too?"

"When you get to be a great writer, and you can still tell me that it was I who helped you, why you couldn't do anything bigger for me!" she exclaimed.

He could not suggest that she was not happy, that perhaps she really needed help, the kind of spur she had given to him; courage, perhaps, or companionship, once in a long time, a wonderful time of talking things over together? How could he say it? That if she wanted his help, needed him, as book agent, or chimney-sweep, he would always be ready, eager! It was stupid to be sitting there, saying nothing, thinking it, and afraid to say it, and the hour nearly gone. Time to be thinking of wool and goat's hair again! He would have to let the broken sentence hang.

"Will you show me the furniture, and the pictures—tomorrow?"

"Not tomorrow."

"The day after?"

She shook her head. Not in words did she tell him that they mustn't begin to meet, often, like this, that

it mustn't seem to be what it wasn't, this wintry little friendship of theirs, but that was what her mind was saying to his, what her expression was telling him. Neither did he tell her that he wouldn't keep it up, this rapid sort of pace—but that he had to tell her all this, didn't he? And she was to have shown him her treasures—afterwards, after the next time, they would meet once in a long while, but she knew; Isabel of course, knew!

"The day after," he urged audaciously.

"That is Saturday. I really work on Saturday, getting ready for Sunday. He doesn't like me to work on Sundays."

Monday, he had to admit, was a bad day for him. So much to do at the office on Monday, because of the half day lost Saturday, and then Sunday in between. Could it be Tuesday?

Isabel agreed at last to Tuesday, and held out a shy, friendly hand to him.

Holding her hand in his! Such a slender hand! Queer thrills it gave him, holding her hand in his! Nothing of the mushy sort, but the way good Catholics must feel when they touch the robe of the Virgin. Not that other sort of feeling. He had told her it was nothing like that. Both of them finished, as far as that sort of sentiment went. A different kind of friendship they had to have, Isabel Blood and Wade Graeme. Two families, two pledges in between.

Standing and looking at her, and holding her hand. Then letting it go, and still looking at her. Going away slowly. Very slowly. Leaving her among her beloved French tables and chairs.

It had been sprinkling when he went into Hertford House. As he emerged, the clouds were breaking, trying to let a pale, timid sun work its way through.

A woman with a basket of flowers on her shawled arm thrust her wares at him.

“Lilacs? Only sixpence. Lilacs?”

Lilac-time in London. Lilac-time in London!

CHAPTER XIII

THE SINGING ORGAN

THINKING of rituals. What had started him thinking of rituals? Because it was Sunday, and in a few hours they would be starting to church? Breakfast was always later on Sundays; it meant a longer time pretending to be asleep, a longer time to think.

Thinking of Surrey and of home rituals; his mother had made a festival of every anniversary: Christmas, Easter-day, the blossoming of the first fruit trees, the first snow-storm! She was a home maker, was Mary Graeme.

That was why the naked ugliness of his own home smote him afresh each day. Here every day was alike, Easter like any other Sunday, Christmas meaning perhaps a better dinner, but not a merrier, prettier one. Couldn't he remember how his mother used to turn into celebration the first narcissus which broke through its sheath? Narcissus in a blue bowl, being greeted as though they were dear friends, come back again! Roses, after, in the peachblow vase which he remembered from earliest childhood; that the rite belonging to June, the month of roses. Then the coming of the snow and a to-do over the getting out of the big boots and the mufflers; a fern put into the shining

brass bowl for the flowerless months, and watching the fronds work their way up!

If one is trained to love such ceremonials, not having them hurts; and how can one have them if just the talk about having them raises such a nasty scene? When bringing home a fern in a bowl makes talk that outlasts the poor, little discredited plant?

The first strawberries in Surrey! Not only a feast, but a celebration. Even the daily salad at Wade House was given its ritual. The dignity she used to give it! He could see the polished shining leaves, ice-crisped, in the silver bowl which had regaled many a generation of Wades with refreshment far less innocent than salad. Her silver tray always intriguing interest, with its complete furnishings of vinegar and oil bottles, sauces and mustards, catsups and relishes that one might choose his variation of dressing. Other bowls, filled with sliced tomatoes, or chopped green peppers, or perhaps minced onions, or cross sections of hard-boiled eggs. He used to love to watch his mother's white, patrician fingers journeying from dish to dish, manipulating the carved wooden salad set which a friend had brought her from Switzerland. Cosmopolitan, she used to say, smiling at him, cosmopolitan, the salad course. The oil from Italy, the lettuce from their home garden whence came also the herbs, thyme, marjoram, parsley and sage; the tomatoes and peppers from France, and the carved tools from Switzerland.

How much of his early education had he got that way, from Mary Graeme who used the simplest, humblest objects as wings to carry them beyond their own

four walls! How he adored her then, how he worshipped her as a wise, tender spirit, now! If he had a child, a child that could accept training, he would want to help it, lead it, follow it, just that patient, daily way.

Little Alma, he still believed, could be helped. He had been reading about such children; there are ways of developing them, special training, but what could you do with its mother opposing, no, resenting, everything he tried to do? *Misunderstanding* what he was trying to do. If she understood, if she realized that she was doing the child an injustice, if he could prove it to her without intimating that little Alma was not like other children, something might be done. But she refused admission to that thought, passionately she repudiated that knowledge. "The child was no different; it was simply not strong."

For a long time now, he had accused this denied bitterness of hers as being the cause of most of their troubles. If she could only bring herself to face it, let him help her with the sorrow she would not admit, it would be like letting fresh air into a room. But he had given up trying to open windows; Alma liked them closed.

Way down the street, somewhere, a barrel organ was playing. He couldn't make out the air it was playing, though it stirred his pulses, the distant sound of it. For Isabel was listening to it, too; lying there, listening, and knowing he was thinking the same thoughts, about that first night, and the poem. It related them, brought them closer, that barrel organ did, with its vulgar music of the London streets.

The street player was coming nearer, rapidly. Not many people care to be wakened on Sunday morning when breakfast is late, and neither office nor school is prodding them. Not many pennies being flung out of hostile, Sunday windows!

He could distinguish the tunes now, Italian tunes, the over-sweet, languorous ones every one whistles and hums through boyhood. Now, an operatic air, florid, and then falling to wistfulness. He associated it with his youth, with yearning adolescence; he could not place it. Something was happening to him, pulling at his heartstrings. Sweet, the misery, though, which comes from those wheeling tunes! Sweet as the unreality of the hopes and fears of youth: just the size of seventeen!

Not such a bad organ. It was one of the new sort which suggests a whole orchestra, sounding now like voices singing, wildly, terribly sweet. Reminding him of all he'd ever hoped to be; of those precious days of Surrey which he hadn't known enough to prize as they passed; reminding him of his splendid, silent mother. Reminding him of the Surrey Lane where the little bunched roses used to grow; of the hedge where he once kissed Janice; reminding him—oh God! of the ecstasies one innocently, guiltily dreamed, and which never come true! Real life, instead, sordid and terrible; no relation to those shining silver wings of hope. No one telling him that a boy must be careful not to fall into traps. No one telling him how terribly final the trap is, the trap that England sets, that England guards. Couldn't help shuddering. Even if Alma

heard and mocked him, he couldn't help shuddering. Thank God, it was going away!

Playing as it went that tune that all London had been humming: "Just a little love." Could one live without it, without the love of a dog, or a child? Even little Alma encouraged to keep away from him: "No, you can't get up until he goes, Alma." "Don't go downstairs; he wants to read," or "Keep quiet, Alma, until he goes. Mother will talk to you, then." Of course, she shrank from him, looking out of her mop of hair at him, strangely, fearfully. And a man likes children to like him; makes him distrust himself to have their distrust. Not even a dog—for Alma hated dogs.

Just a little love!

Isabel listening, too. Not a stone's throw away, their minds touching, and the whole world between.

Getting to be a blur of sound, the barrel organ. Gone now, thank God!

He would never forget those few, queer minutes. He did not know yet what had happened to him, but he would find out later which boundary of his journey he had reached. He couldn't think, couldn't think it out, lying there—

Without answering, or even listening to Alma's surprise that he was going in first, he bolted into the bathroom. He kept the water splashing in the tub to drown the memory of "Santa Lucia," of the "Barcarolle." He went through some of his old setting up exercises in order to throw off the despondent languor that the music had induced.

Sunday. Another Sunday to live through. Church. Dinner. With Alma. And supper. Maybe church again. And a long, weary time until it was decent to go to sleep again.

Breakfast was got through, and the bustle of cleaning up and getting ready for church submitted to. Never before had it so irritated him. Never had her air of martyrdom so enraged him. He would have enjoyed shutting himself into the kitchen, and making the dishes and pans shine from hot water and vigorous polishing. He wanted to take a stand against their home habits, against her self-martyrdom, against their church-going unless there were a churchly spirit. He felt like a hypocrite, going to church in this mood—Alma and the child fussing; everybody getting in each other's way; snarling like angry dogs, and then hushing into sullen silence as soon as one reached the street!

He was stalking along by Alma's side, wondering what would happen if he should cut and run; his eyes were on the pavement, and he was nursing his revolt, when something pulled his gaze, and there, right ahead of him, was Isabel, with her husband, that man Blood. Going to meet at the corner, face to face, unless he manœuvred and quickly. He couldn't cut across the street without making a row. Alma would want to know why—

The Bloods were crossing to the other side of the street; he supposed Isabel had manipulated it. He had got, though, the full impact of her shock. He had seen her glance fly from him to Alma, and then to the pitiful child, with its drooping jaw—Cad, he had been to let his own eyes fall under hers, before

she looked at Alma. She knew now that he was a coward; afraid of his wife. It was true. Hadn't he been trying to get the courage to tell Alma that he wasn't going to church with her? To leave her at the church steps, running off to one day of freedom? He hadn't the nerve. Because he knew what he would hear the day after. Following, like a whipped cur; and Isabel now knowing that he was a coward.

Watching them covertly, under drooping lids, he thought that the Bloods were going to the same church. His step lagged. He would not meet them on the church steps; go up the vestibule, side by side?

They were outstripping the Graemes, Isabel, he could see, a little in advance. It burst on him. She did not want him to bow to her. She did not want to give Blood a chance to discover that the book agent lived in the neighbourhood! Isabel wasn't thinking him a bounder.

He wanted to suggest to Alma that they go to their own church, the low church she liked when they were not late in getting started. But it was late; it would mean 'bus fares; Alma would argue—

He could see the usher showing the Bloods to a pew when he entered. Alma wanted to go forward, but Graeme held back. The choir was entering, so Alma could not discuss it. Sullenly, she took a seat in a rear pew, the child and Graeme following.

During the processional, a stranger was shown to their pew. Graeme moved gratefully into the aisle, giving her his seat next his family. He could watch Isabel, if he were not sitting by Alma.

He had the chance to observe Blood. He was

middle-aged; he looked older by daylight; and obviously pious. Genuflecting whenever there was any excuse. The sort that likes High Church without knowing why. Alma did not like it. She came here once in a while only to save carfare.

Isabel, he noticed, did not genuflect. He speculated about her beliefs. Did she come to church because it makes the day easier to do as one is expected to do? Did she, too, love the human thrill of the organ, respond to the splendid, sonorous syllables of the English service?

Unintentionally alliterative, that sentence. It wasn't a bad sentence, really. He was acquiring the author's trick of self-conscious sentences.

How could she help liking the grand old chants which for centuries England has been singing up to the sky? Singing them to the frowning skies of London; to the tented blue of Devonshire and Surrey. "Oh, all ye works of the Lord, praise ye the Lord, praise him and magnify him for ever!"

Even if a man is not quite sure of his belief, because he wants to be rigidly honest with himself about it, he likes to think of them singing it, his own people, millions of them, each Sunday morning, the whole great island singing it: "Oh, all ye works of the Lord, praise ye the Lord!" It makes the great hope seem true, all of 'em saying together: "We praise thee, oh Lord, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord!"

He believed, all right, that man; Blood. Swallowed it whole, as the whale swallowed Jonah. A literalist, he'd gamble. See him singing it! Not only believing it, but wanting every one to know that he believes it.

Wants every one to see that he knows it so well that he doesn't have to consult a prayerbook or hymnal, singing it from memory.

Not a gentleman, Blood. And yet when one comes to analyze it, the difference between the man who is a gentleman, and the one who isn't, is rather subtle. It isn't as if one could put a finger on one screaming fault, and say: This bars you out eternally. It's less obvious than that, else Isabel could never have married him.

All her pretty colour gone today!

Not one loud mistake to point to; little mistakes, many of them, absurd, each in itself, making up the indictment; waistcoat a little high-coloured, and yet the same stuff perhaps which Fackenthal or Jepson might buy; watch chain too broad; wager he wears a seal. A big one. A lodge seal. Fellows like that always belong to lodges. They go to church on Sundays, and to lodge several times a week. Grandmasters of lodges because they can't be grandmasters of anything else!

The braid on his frockcoat a trifle too wide; his tie too red; the stripes of his trousers too wide, and too far apart, for a gentleman. Absurd, but true, all the same. No one could mistake him for the right sort, because of his taste in stripes. Butchers wear that kind; and sometimes the sort of men who like to be grandmasters of lodges.

Looking at him fairly, while he was not bellowing the hymns, he was decent enough, as men go; for almost any woman but Isabel. But for that girl of sweetness and light—it hurt him to think of it. The girl who did not want ugliness even underneath her roses!

Look at her now, with the painted sunlight staining her pretty waving hair!

She might be anything. She had the quiet air. *Her* clothes were plain enough for a duchess. He remembered that she told him that she made her own clothes. Quiet taste, but not English. A touch that women would probably say was French. That woman sitting next her, with the brown dress on, blue hat and a red feather, could any one hazard her to be French?

Her hat had roses on it; two deep red roses, growing up out of a bed of violets. She would have to put poetry into her hats.

Same church holding the four of them, two couples, two pairs of married strangers, praying and singing in the church which said it was holy the way they lived! Alma hating him; himself hating Alma. Isabel afraid of that man in wide stripes; and married to him. And they ask you to believe it is holy, not the way you live it, but *because* you live it.

Not holy. It wasn't even right.

He could imagine it holy; with people of the same sort.

Two kinds of marriages. People chained together, belonging to each other, one kind.

The other, when minds and souls are related to each other. No chains; each loving the other's liberty. Could it be made practical, meaning, could it stand the tests? He thought it could. That writing fellow who wrote *The Ways of Men* thought it could: It would entail giving thought to the custom, as a custom; studying it; not being afraid to approach it; but being willing to investigate it scientifically, as one

would study other human relationships. Fancy, the horror that would shake England!

The crowd, falling on its knees, carried him to his praying stool. The choir boys began to move, carrying the cross towards the congregation while the pious genuflected; the rest gathered up their purses and umbrellas. Everybody now in a hurry to get home to the Sunday beef or mutton because the sermon had been over-long.

"What are you rushing so for?" panted Alma, catching up to him in the vestibule. "Wait here. I want one of those leaflets."

He heard Isabel's voice behind him. He pretended not to have understood Alma. He walked straight ahead, down the church steps.

Alma caught up to him, out of breath. She was dragging the child whose jaw was sagging.

"I told you to wait for me."

"Oh, did you?" He maintained his brisk pace.

"You know I did. You don't want to be seen with us. In our shabby clothes. Oh, I know. You're ashamed of us. Afraid some of your grand friends might see you."

"Don't scream so." He was in an agony. He thought Isabel and Blood were immediately behind them.

"I'm not screaming. Why are you so particular all of a sudden?"

They had reached the corner. Graeme managed a half look over his shoulder. A strange couple were behind him. Isabel and Blood were not in sight.

"Then keep on whatever it is you are doing," he said, suddenly indifferent.

He caught the edge of the look she threw him.

After dinner, he escaped. The rest of the afternoon, he spent on the tops of 'busses, going up and down London, crisscrossing London, finding himself in unfamiliar sections, not caring where he was going, as long as he was in motion. He had to be doing something, for his soul was in a ferment. Thinking of the street organ, and the sudden rush of revolt, of his inchoate determination that life should be different; not knowing how, but knowing it must begin to be different; of the meeting on the street; of Isabel's pensive face; of married life in general. He found himself scanning the faces of every couple. Married? Pretending content with the system? Finding a way to make it sweet?

Coming back from Kew there was an old couple sitting in front of him. He had noticed the old gentleman helping the lady into the 'bus, and up the steps. He observed him opening and adjusting her sunshade, heard her thanking him. Just as if they were not married; friends. Maybe, they were old friends. Possibly she was taking him around sight-seeing, after a long absence. The man looked like an army officer. His face and neck were deeply sun-scorched, his hair as white as cotton. Just home from India, perhaps.

Graeme was glad his seat was out of hearing distance. He was going to think of them as husband and wife. Wanted to think that two people could endure each other through all the testing intimacy of the

subtracting years. He didn't want to hear her call her companion: "Colonel," or "brother." It ought to be possible for love to survive all the shocks of daily disillusionment; no, it should be possible for love to suppress them! If the affection is precious enough in the beginning to seem worth making a conscious, daily effort for, if both want to preserve it; one can imagine imagination and patience, thought, self control applied to the task. Both wanting it hard enough.

Fine old couple, that. Enjoyed watching them. Liking each other better because they had met the shocks together. As field comrades who have fought against a common foe. Having shared things together, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears; homely problems: the chimney smoking, drains out of order, and the maid leaving in a pet; or, "isn't it time to have the living-rooms re-papered?" With roses?

Nice old married couple. Getting off now, at Piccadilly Circus. Going to have dinner together down town, for it's the maid's Sunday out—

And having at last to go back to one's own home!

CHAPTER XIV

RECOGNITION

ON Monday, the *Globe* printed his story. The office knew it before he did. Hobbs showed it to him. Hobbs' manner was different. The *Globe* had thrust the routine clerk into a different position, not alone spotlighting Graeme, but giving hope, suggesting opportunity to all the rest. If the routineer who was willing to let youths outstrip him in the office could break into the *Globe*, why then the rest of them could! A new angle was being applied to the years of brooding: not the daze of failure; the abstraction of the scribbler, was it, after all?

All this, Hobbs' manner conveyed when he pointed out the story to Graeme. What he said was: "I didn't know you were one of us. You must come to some of our meetings some night."

He knew he must have looked puzzled, for Hobbs added: "Maybe you didn't know you were a socialist? Lots of 'em don't, and wake up full-fledged."

Graeme laid the paper on his desk, remarking that he wanted to look it over, as soon as he finished this column, to see how many ghastly printing mistakes had crept in. He knew by the grin on Hobbs' face as he turned away that he was thinking the story would be snatched up and read the instant after.

He did not snatch it up. He let it lie there, still

damp from the presses, under his eyes, with the clerks peeping at him every little while. He had his work to do. And he had acquired the epicure's taste for reading: time and place *right*. He liked his table spread, as for a ceremonial, the Surrey habit, the Wade House habit of life. He hated to have to snatch his victuals, as does a dog his ungarnished bone. Had he not painfully learned that if one reads a book with a sense of guilt or haste, the keen edge of the pleasure is turned? The *Globe* story could wait for a leisure moment, for one of those precious periods when he belonged, unchallenged, to himself.

And tomorrow he would take it to Isabel.

Not such a drab thing, life.

He took her, also, a volume of Masfield. Had he had time to search, he would have found verse which would have pleased him more to give her, more nearly related to her. He did not know many of the new verse-writers, and she knew all the old ones, so he bought the Masfield volume on the way to Hertford House.

She was sitting where he had left her, as though she had not moved since then. It occurred to him that it is justifiable to sit waiting a half hour or so, if before a Murillo. No one challenges you, if it's a Murillo or a Raphael.

She still wore the pensive expression he had noticed in church, and he thought she looked a little more dragged. Her face brightened when she spied him. She was all eagerness to tell him about his story. She had been buying the *Globe* every day lest she miss his article while still quite fresh! Oh, she had known he

would do it well, but not as cleverly as that. It wasn't only style, and he had a style, strikingly individual, she thought, but it was the conviction with which he wrote, the sincerity. She was so proud!

So she thought, too, that he had a different way of saying things? Then it was true, if she with her fine discrimination had discovered it. She had more to say about it, and he surrendered himself to the surprising joy of the moment. He felt bursting with content. Sitting by Isabel, and listening to her praise what he had written; answering her questions, her acute discernments, saying that "This was a fact." And: "He had seen that happen." She was giving him not only satisfaction with a particular attainment, but the stimulus to go on.

He interrupted her to ask if she were feeling quite well? If anything had happened. Questioning the pallor of her cheeks. What had happened to the pretty lips which were always so vividly, naturally red?

She did not meet his eyes when she said that she was quite well. That nothing had happened.

He watched her. She was looking fagged. For the first time, he realized her fragility. Not delicacy, maybe, but hers was the delicate type. Such people have sometimes a wiry hold on life; but he wished she looked heartier. She needed sunshine, this French rose. Not London, not the smokes and fogs of London. He wondered if that man took the right sort of care of her? Wasn't she reading too much, alone too much? He sat waiting for her eyes to turn back to his.

And the slender, pretty Isabel who needed the sun of France or Surrey to shine upon her, at last turned her eyes to Graeme's. They sat staring at each other, neither speaking, neither wanting to speak. All the things he had been bursting to tell her, all the proud joy she had expected to share with him, dropping out of sight, forgotten. Minutes passing, all the clocks in London ticking time away at a dreadful rate as a man and woman sat and stared at each other, life never the same again.

He hadn't realized it, not fully, not completely. Loving her, of course, how could one help loving her, the sweetness, the gentleness of her? But this solemn way, recognition—why it was as though one had been staring for a long time at a face and finds it is one's own, staring at one's self in a mirror. Unity. Himself and Isabel. Thinking the same things, minds of one piece, understanding the other, understanding life the same way, seeing it as though out of the same window. That was what his willingness to accept his fate meant, accepting Bird Place—Loving Isabel.

"I lied, didn't I, when I said it was different, with us. I didn't know, then, on from the first, yes, in a way, but not how much it was. I did not know it could be this way, that it is true, what poets, the writing people say about it. Something outside of you, bigger than you, inevitable, eternal, explaining everything; completion," halted Graeme.

Isabel's eyes, large and mournful, acknowledged that she had been knowing it for some time. He remembered her shocked stare of Sunday when she had seen him with his family. Strange that they did not

doubt one another, having seen the kind of person each had chosen to go through life with. Most people would not understand.

Seeing him as a family man, too, must have added to her new mournfulness. Though he had never mentioned Alma, she knew of course that he was married. But *seeing people* makes them suddenly real. He could understand now the look on her face in church—

He had known he adored her, but loving her,—how could any one see her without wanting to be with and protect and love her? Some women, the rare sort, are like that. But that she loved him, Graeme, the automaton, ah, there was the miracle!

“Is it worse, do you think,” his voice was as low as though the room were not empty, and the guard three rooms away, “worse than if we had never met, not living at Bird Place, I at the Karroo, say, and you—”

“At Annersley,” she completed. “No, better than *that*.”

But she said it without eagerness. It was not kind, their fate, but it was kinder than that: half lives; going through life without knowing that the other lived, the twin mind that understands and trusts and makes life’s meaning clear!

It was not going to mean peace for them. He knew that. He didn’t have to look at Isabel’s face to know what it was going to mean. This wonderful minute of his wouldn’t last, this sense of attainment, of thankfulness. One doesn’t stand still; just as one article in the *Globe* doesn’t eternally satisfy one; becomes, later on, a teasing urge to press on.

This moment, though, throbbed with ecstasy. To have a woman like Isabel loving him! He knew now what adoration was like; he could realize the fervour of the worshipful before their carved virgins. It was adoration, worship, he felt for Isabel.

What he saw in her eyes made him feel capable and daring, strong enough for any tilt. But one can't prove one's love by strength or courage these modern days. One meets her in an art gallery, and gives her a copy of a newspaper, one walks a little slower when passing her window at night, and that's all there is to it. One cannot dash into her life and spirit her away from her sadness, her loneliness, but he was sure that those century or so dead fellows who spilled over into sonnets knew no more than he of what worship means.

He looked at her hand, aching to hold it. In a public place like Hertford House, with people apt to come in any second, and wanting to hold her hand, to stoop and kiss her fingers for the blessing she had bestowed upon him, all the starved worship of his dreams pressed into her fingers! He let his eyes tell her that he wanted to; and then his lips told her: he wanted to kiss her fingers; he wanted to kiss the lips which had confessed her love for him; he wanted to kiss her dear eyes, to kiss them shut, to kiss them open again, that he might see that it was no wild dream that she loved Wade Graeme!

A shudder shook her. The terror which ran into her eyes chilled him. He demanded:

"What were they going to do about it? What could they do?"

"Nothing," she said, assenting to his thought. But

her eyes betrayed her. They had told him she could not go on with her life, now that she *knew*.

He shook himself free from her fear. He had to cheer her before he left her. "I have to go, in a minute, Isabel, and I've not told you yet how I am needing your help."

"Oh, I do want to help you! Can't you tell me how? Can't you wait to tell me?"

"Won't you meet me here, again?" He had risen. He stood bending over her, subduing his voice, as though the room were full of people. "I've no more time, now," he added, before she could say that she ought not to be meeting him any more.

"Here?" she debated.

It was dark in those rooms, and cold. She needed all the sun and air she could get. Thoughtless of him to expect her to wait in these cold rooms for him.

"It's spring, in Hyde Park," he suggested.

"Spring! Why it's nearly summer!" She had been to Hyde Park, the day before, she told him. "The lilacs were fading, and the irises were gone. Soon the roses would be coming out."

"Not tomorrow, but the day after, in Hyde Park? You *must* say yes, Isabel!" he implored.

"The day after? In Hyde Park? Do you think we should?"

"I'm going to be there anyway," announced Wade, to settle it. "Near the Achilles statue. I'll come in at the Hyde Park Corner. About ten minutes past twelve. You don't need to tell me. *I'll* be there anyway. I've got to go now. Tell me again! My Isabel!"

Afterward, on the 'bus, he wondered how he had torn himself away from that look of hers, clinging, fearing, loving!

When he looked back from the door through which he had come, she was sitting as he had found her, with her eyes on the picture of the Holy Family.

CHAPTER XV

A CHEQUE

THE memory of that meeting of revelation would have been pure bliss if he had not sensed what their love was going to mean to Isabel. He had the refuge of his work, and she "had not much to do except on Saturdays!" At his home, affection was not required of him; he was at least spared that. Isabel probably had to submit to affection: one couldn't think of living in the same house with Isabel, and not wanting to caress her. It was unendurable, thinking of her having to submit to affection—

He was thankful that he had his work to turn to, and then he made the discovery that he couldn't write; had lost the trick; he had nothing to write about. Mind always creeping back to Isabel.

Anybody can write one story. And he had written his!

Somewhere in his book prowlings he had read of insects who die after their one great moment of creation. He had had his, the wild moment of delirium, or production. That was the sum of his attainment? He fell to depths of unplumbed despair.

His homecoming grew more difficult; the meals more graceless; little Alma more piteous. Not able to write, he told himself, meant never being able to

burst his prison walls. After being given a glimpse of open fields, wide open spaces of growth, and then the prison doors clanging! All the worse, because of that glimpse of freedom.

Not that he'd planned to desert Alma and the child. But a way of fulfilling his duty to them, and to give his soul a holiday. Which means money, extra money she does not know about, so cannot demand and have a scene over. Money for those extra meals downtown.

He had suggested to Alma, making his voice casual as he said it, that the house expenses would be lessened, as well as the work, if he staid downtown regularly two or three times a week. That he found it easier to do his work after the other men had gone; she knew how it was! He was trying to do some studying. For one can't keep up with the game, younger men coming along to oust one, unless one studies.

Her answer, and the look that had accompanied, burned like acid. So she thought that he was planning wild orgies on the money he had suggested withdrawing from her allowance? Was it an allowance he gave her? Bringing back his salary the day he draws it; handing it over to her, and getting back what she decided he needed for the next thirty days, which one gets the allowance, he'd like to know?

Then the cheque came.

He had given a good deal of thought to the cheque. His speculation had covered small and large sums. Not the first night of ecstasy and anguish when he had thought of nothing but the need of getting it out of him, and on to paper; he had not thought of the compensation then. But later on, taking up the manu-

script, and finding it fairly decent, coming out of a nest of wool and goat's hair one might say, the question began to tease. What would he get for it? How would Jepson value it, having ordered it, although from a raw recruit? Enough to pay for the extra dinners downtown, he hoped, and something over to add to his liberty fund.

The cheque was lying on his desk when he came down one morning, several days after his last meeting with Isabel at Hertford House. Fackenthal had just stopped him in the hall to tell him that Jepson was much pleased with the story. And coming in to his desk, there was the cheque. In a *Globe* envelope which anybody could see.

There were clerks about, so he couldn't satisfy his curiosity at once. Hobbs was standing by his desk, waiting for some papers, he said. He had to wait until he could find the papers for Hobbs who wanted to talk to him. A ripping speaker, he thought Hobbs said, from the States, was giving a talk that night. He'd like to have Graeme go with him. He supposed Hobbs would like to be able to tell the office what he got for that antique drivel!

After Hobbs left him, carrying the desired papers, he opened the *Globe* envelope. Five pounds!

Not once had it crossed his mind that he would get as much as five pounds.

Decent of Jepson. Awfully decent. Treated him as though he weren't raw; encouraging him, because the *Globe* likes to discover new talent. Due to Fackenthal. And to his mother.

If he were just any one, who had had to push his

way into the *Globe* outer office, had even achieved an interview with the great Jepson himself, think he'd have been given five pounds for the first thing submitted? Hundreds of men would give their eye teeth for just such a chance, and it had fallen to him. Because he was an old friend of Fackenthal's. Perhaps he had been losing such opportunities by refusing invitations from the other old friends, the Knights and the rest?

A mole he was, a burrowing thing. Not taking what was in his grasp, what other fellows, born on the outside, have to scheme for. Jepson, and the way out! His liberty fund!

Alma endured him because of his salary. Whatever else he could earn, might that not be his? A room by himself wouldn't cost much. He could get the furniture at second hand. He'd already priced it. And dinners downtown three times a week. If the margin were large enough, why not every night in the week? The expanding thought made him breathless, why go home at all? Why not work for that, for independence? A room downtown, a cell of a room lined with books, no reason why not, if he could give Alma enough to get along on!

She would oppose it, his second thoughts told him. For Alma was orthodox. She believed in people staying together, once they were married. He knew how she felt about that. She knew some people at the Cape, unholy people, who had done that sort of thing, couldn't get along, so lived apart. She would accuse him of being wild; of wanting younger, prettier women.

But what trips he would take, were he free! Trips to Paris and Italy; and he yearned to go to Bozen, and Meran, and Cortina. The mob could have Switzerland. He wanted to see the Dolomites before those wonder-hued mountains became the world's iced birthday cake, as Switzerland had got to be. Egypt, perhaps, if the margin ever got big enough, a week of spring in Rome, spring when the lilacs and the irises were blooming by old stone walls, when the Scala di Spagna was aglow with spring sunshine and spring blossoms and the brilliant dresses of peasants; not only a lure for the tourist dollars, but because the Latins *live* their poetry.

Living poetry. Wonder if there isn't an idea there? Not for the *Globe*, perhaps, but for another sort of paper, or magazine. The British don't live their poetry. The Latins, the French and Italians, do live theirs. Doesn't that put a different quality into their verse? He would have to read a lot, to make his case.

With an exhilarating sense of justification he dined at a restaurant that night. At the table, he was fairly bursting with excitement. He wished Isabel were sitting opposite, that he might tell her of the five pounds. His waitress might not have been so haughty over his order, looking over her shoulder for a more promising prospect, the kind that gives lavish orders, if she knew about that five pounds lying in his desk.

This exhilaration meant that he was in the mood for writing. It was the way he felt the night after leav-

ing Jepson and Fackenthal. He hastened his meal; no wine, nor ale! He wanted the full integrity of his mind if he were going to turn his "foolish thinking into funds."

This story, he reminded himself, would be more difficult than the last one. That had the colour of an unfamiliar country to enrich it. Not many people have been to the Cape, spent nights on the Karroo. But to prove there is an undiscovered country, right here, in London, a task here, to prove skill.

He needed a stiff task to keep his mind off Isabel. His thoughts insisted on running back to her, like a whining dog which wants to bury his nose in his mistress' skirts.

If it were to be a real meal for a fastidious public, there would have to be good, juicy meat in it; meant lots of reading. Isabel would help him there—

A perpetual motion game that, to earn money out of one's reading which gives one a chance to read more! Not a bad life for a man who likes rituals, who understands why the French and Italians put poetry into their meals, under the grapevines, or on the sidewalk under an arbour if there is no garden, with a bottle of wine and a dish of paste or salad. Live their poetry, they do, while we only read it. Isabel tries to live hers, with her roses, her crowds—Isabel!

Soberly he left the eating house as a man should when he is keeping an appointment with his own soul. He tried to keep his mind on his story, tried to refuse admission to Isabel, though how she could help him,

get him started on the right road! Could help him far more than that bored virgin of the British Museum Library!

Frightful job, that, to be a custodian of the world's wisdom. Doling it out in capsules. Naturally, it subdues one. It would be like reading the dictionary; one drowns in words. Drowning in facts, the librarians of the British Museum Library. Poetry all about them, but they see only the capsules, after they are made. Isabel sees it being made—

A face, passing, reminded him of some one he used to know, he thought at the Cape. He wheeled, and the man, who had turned to look at him, wheeled, too, and passed into the crowd which was moving theatrewards. Not so swiftly that Graeme did not catch a glimpse of a goldheaded stick, flashily fashioned. Odd, he thought, that his memory associated the stranger with the Cape, before seeing the stick. Like that walking stick he found at his house—

It was possible that he had seen or met that fellow at the Cape. His was an obstinate, retentive memory; it never forgot a face. He might have met this man but once, to remember him years later in a London crowd.

He flooded the offices with light. When the reading room was adjusted to his needs, table placed perfectly, paper and pencils ready, he found his mind straying back to the Karroo.

He reread the *Globe* story. It astonished him, referring to his notes, how much he had cut out. Enough stuff for another Cape story, with a different objective. Good notion to follow up the *Globe* story.

The poetry notion would require time. He would work at this one while reading up for the next. The idea would not blow away!

At ten o'clock he pushed back his chair. One article, printed and paid for. Another well started, blocked out, and planning to read up for the third. His foot on the ladder. Life not so drab. A woman to worship, a goal to reach, some sweet memories, why should he complain?

His love for Isabel brought him nearer, oddly, to his mother. She must have been once, like Isabel. He had to go into the room where his desk was, to put his hand on the picture of Wade House. In the dark, standing there, his eyes filling up, as though the wells of his soul, long dry, were refilling. Because of her belief in him, he might yet be what she wanted him to be.

Standing there, in the half light, a glimmer filtering through the transom from the outer hall, he could believe himself in the sitting-room at Wade House, in the twilight, having run in after a late game of tennis, or a walk with his dogs, to find her lying on the sofa, as he had often found her, looking out into the night, the night she was facing. Putting out his hands to find her, and meeting her soft, upturned face!

As if he had his hand now on her brow. And blessing her. Blessing her. Telling her that he had been in prison, her son, and that at last he was free.

Standing quietly there, sending his spirit out into the night, wherever she was. That minute, hers and his. Her son!

CHAPTER XVI

A FORMULA FOR GENIUS

FACKENTHAL had not reported completely to Graeme his talk with Jepson when he stopped him in the hall to tell him that the editor was much pleased with his story, adding, as a subtle hint, or spur, that that was Jepson's particular self-indulgence; he liked to discover new talent. Jepson had said more. But the rest was not for Graeme's ears.

He had met Jepson in the vestibule of the club, Fackenthal entering in his deliberate and leisurely way, Jepson explosively leaving, as was his custom. Neither social or business engagements did the editor ever hasten, as long as they were entertaining, or promised to be profitable. Time seemed valueless to him at such moments, or when writing a letter, or an editorial. The last drop of juice from the fruit, the complete meat from the nut, then haste came to Jepson. The next thing urged hurry, the engagement he'd forgotten, had kept hanging, perhaps, with all of London, it might be between, and no time allowed for the journey.

"I don't live with a watch in my hand," he would defend his habit to his friends. "Just as I've begun to have a good time here, people warming up, getting together, you'd have me run away to another place where I may be bored to death? Always going some-

where else, spending one's life getting to places! Not for me! Pleasant moments are priceless."

The presses would have to wait for him, for an editorial paragraph needed, if Jepson were writing a letter. Nothing mattered at that minute, but that letter. "Why do we write unless it's important, what what we've got to say to the other fellow? Then it's important that he gets our exact meaning, our complete meaning. I don't write to get a duty off my mind."

Outsiders rarely saw the leisurely Jepson. The Public, and his critics, knew the hurried Jepson, head down, bolting through corridors, or sitting in his car, with lips compressed, seeing no one. His hurrying figure was one of the best known in London. A pose, his critics called his habit of bolting and speeding, as though, the editor of a rival paper once said: "As though the *Globe* were the *Sun*, and people paid any serious attention to its rising!"

Fackenthal had halted him to speak of Graeme's story. He wanted to know what Jepson thought of it. Pretty decent he thought; no trace of the amateur.

Jepson squinted at his friend. He was an hour late for an appointment with an Austrian editor who was returning to Vienna the next day. It had just occurred to him how important that interview was. He was seeing Fackenthal through a daze, and found it difficult to place Graeme. The incident began to come back to him, as he stood there, frowning. Fackenthal, his firm, wool and goat's hair, the fellow they had sent to the Cape,—and then it was permanently established.

"There's good stuff in him," stated Fackenthal, wanting Jepson's corroboration. He himself wasn't sure. Those eight years of paralysis had discouraged him. This might be only a flash of strength, showing what might have been.

"He has talent, undoubtedly. It may be more. I'll tell you what he has. It's the trick of suffering, of taking things, the storms of life, full in the face, taking the hurt, not evading it, not deadening one's nerves to it. You know what I mean? He's all cutis, no cuticle. If you can turn that type towards creating, you can generally make something big out of it."

Fackenthal beamed. He had not expected so much. It was a pleasant thought, Mary Graeme's son succeeding, making something of himself, the boy that should have been his son. Gratifying, too, to think that he had helped him a little on his way.

"He has had plenty to suffer over," he admitted. "Though he doesn't talk about it." He was not going to talk about it either. It was not necessary. It would be as disloyal as opening and betraying a friend's letter. "He has known gentle days, decent surroundings. And he hasn't them, now."

"I saw that," said Jepson, buttoning his coat. "But don't regret it. That's the forcing bed. If he were in the right surroundings, had got them without effort, that trick of suffering might be deadened. Poignant feeling is easily spoiled. You know what I mean? He might write nicely enough, millions can do that, correct, classic, passionless, superficial. But when you know beauty and culture and daintiness, and you

haven't got it, and you're starving for it, you run a good chance to fight your way through to where it all is. Talent can be forced into genius, or near genius, in that sort of hot-bed, Fackenthal."

"I hope that you are going to force one this time," responded his friend, more broadly beaming.

"It isn't the mere putting words and sentences together. That's essential, of course, but anybody can learn how to do that." Jepson had forgotten his appointment with the Austrian editor. "It's seeing ahead, being able to see ahead, that counts. One must be a pioneer in ideas. One has to delve beneath the established order of things, see the upheavals working below transitions, you know what I mean? lose all reverence for tradition, lose reverence for anything in the world but truth. Not just pretend to. The market is full of writing fakirs hunting for new ideas to exploit, in order that they in turn may be exploited. They are rockets. Their work may be brilliant for a moment, but it's not sincere, not lasting. But to find the truth through suffering, through having met the storms in the face, why that plus the trick of what the Germans call *das ge flugelte Wort*, is apt to lead to permanent achievement."

"I hope that you're right," repeated Fackenthal, suspecting he had uncovered a hobby.

Jepson started for the outer door, and then came back.

"There are a few privileges which ease the responsibility of a paper like the *Globe*. This is one of them. I encourage budding talent; give it a genuine chance. I lead it on, tempt it with encouragement. If it's a

fakir, the loss is little, and out he goes. But if it's a bulldog, one that can stand discouragement, and I tempt them with that, too, the *Globe* is his. Once in a while, I land a bulldog. Think perhaps you found one for me. Watch that fellow's jaw when he thinks you're not watching him."

"Hope so," rejoined Fackenthal, amazed. Thoughtfully he went upstairs. It was surprising to have uncovered all this. Mary's son!

He was beginning to think of Graeme as though he were a blood relation. His talk with Jepson pleased him the more he thought about it. He was recalling it when he stopped to speak to Wade, though he told him only what Jepson thought of his article. He thought of it increasingly after a talk with the janitor. He had stopped to ask Mumford if many of the men used the rest room, after office hours?

"Mr. Graeme, sir. Three times a week, now. The hothers came hin, hoccasionally, sir."

Fackenthal was moving on when Mumford halted him.

"Perhaps hi horter to tell you, sir. A woman comes, too."

Fackenthal stopped, as by a blow.

"She's been 'ere, twice. No, three times, looking harfter 'im."

Not a bulldog. Just a false dawn, the stimulus of a love adventure.

"With him, you say?"

"Looking harfter 'im, sir. 'E's never seen 'er. 'E doesn't know hit, sir. She's watchin' 'im, she doesn't

want 'im to know. Snoops, and harsks questions. A queer sort, not 'is kind, sir."

The wife, thought Fackenthal, clearly the Boer wife. Mumford's description, "the queer sort," meant the kind that does not give a gratuity to a janitor who answers her questions.

He felt immensely relieved. To have traced this late blooming to a vulgar adventure would have disappointed him keenly; to have had the rest room used for a tryst, by Graeme, would have hurt him. Especially after his talk with Jepson. He was glad it was not that.

"The wife was spying on him! She does not believe that he is at work. That means she hasn't been told about his writing. She thinks he is carousing—while he is struggling, having to hide his ambitions as though they were guilt. Pretty tough, Wade!"

"I'm glad you told me about that," he told Mumford, and was passing, but the man again stopped him.

"Hit was a man, once. Not your sort. Not 'is sort."

"Watching Graeme, too? What did he want?"

"Snooping. 'Er sort."

It bothered Fackenthal, and aroused his fighting blood. He began to plan to circumvent that woman who wanted to drag Wade back. Jealous, was she, he wondered? He speculated about the man Mumford had spoken of. It was not likely that Alma would spend any of her hoarded shillings on a detective. He suspected that she demanded all of Wade's salary. And they lived like beggars! He fancied he

had stumbled on the reason: she thought he was earning more money than he was giving her; she was shadowing him to see how he was spending it.

Fackenthal made the discovery that he was enjoying his assumed fatherhood. He determined that he was not going to be thwarted by such a negligible obstacle as the Boer wife. He was going to see more of Wade, he promised himself.

But that was not easy to arrange. One does not see much of one's clerks, because they are one's clerks. It upsets discipline, Knight insisted. And if a man is working out a stubborn evolution from whipped puppy to fighting bulldog, he must be allowed time for himself, must have those three evenings a week to himself. But cannot a well-wisher, questioned Fackenthal, assist that evolution? The club, he debated, was good, once in a while. It would mean establishing a profitable friendship, perhaps, but it would also mean evading pleasant friendships which cost money. For going around takes money. And then it occurred to him that the only way he could get around the delicate item of expense was to invite Graeme, as his guest, for a trip somewhere.

He thought of Scotland. But Scotland would mean money again. A shoot has its drawbacks to a man whose wife ties the pursestrings. For the same reason he dismissed a week-end at the Country club. Golf, like shooting, demands its proper clothes.

Paris? The idea of a jaunt to Paris enchanted him. He remembered that he knew a lot of interesting people over there, painting fellows, and others. He decided that he would call it a week-end, and then

lengthen it artfully. A bank holiday was discovered to be on its way. That would give them four days. They would travel at night, to give Wade the full value of the days in Paris. There would be some "snooping," he supposed, to see if the clerk-husband were truly travelling with his employer. But small difference that would make, to Wade, in Paris!

He achieved a seemingly casual meeting with Graeme, in the outer office, at closing time. They walked out into the hall together. 'There Fackenthal said:

"I'm bored with London, Wade. I'm going to run away."

Graeme knew he was flushing. It had been a long time since Mr. Fackenthal had called him "Wade."

"I get restless, every now and then, for Paris. I get what I call a Paris hunger. London is all right, for a time, for a long time, but then it's got to be Paris, the Champs Elysées, the Place de la Concorde when the lights are being lit, the Champs Elysées when the lights are shining on the streets wet from a quick shower. I'm thinking of running over for the week-end."

Wade made his face express sympathy. Nice to be able to run over to Paris when you're bored with London. That's freedom.

His surprise came quickly, for Fackenthal was saying:

"I must be getting old. I don't like going alone, I find. Like roast without salt, a trip now by myself. I'd like to have you go with me, as my son, Wade."

It was nicely done. Not even a Wade pride could

take umbrage. Paris! As Fackenthal's son. That meant being taken as his guest, meant giving his soul a holiday. He would have new memories to share with Isabel, memories she would love, of her beloved France. He wondered what Alma would say about it?

"Take your time to think it over, to arrange for it," suggested Fackenthal.

"I have thought. I'm going. And it's awfully kind of you, Mr. Fackenthal."

"Good. That's ripping," said his employer. "Wednesday night then. We'll go at night to save all the time we can for Paris."

"Wednesday?" questioned Graeme, amazed.

"It's a bank holiday, Thursday. That's what put it into my head, made it possible. I'll meet you here at five, and we'll dine together at the club,—I'll look up trains before I make any plans, and send you a memo, Wade."

"Thank you, sir," again said Graeme.

Going to Paris; with Fackenthal; as his son. Friday, Saturday, Sunday in Paris; Thursday, too! It would be a rich experience, going with Fackenthal, who knew all kinds of people. He was up in art, too, he kept up, in books and drama and music. It would be a short cut to the best in Paris. He would have a lot to tell Isabel, afterwards. But first, he had to tell Alma—

She met it the usual way.

"It's nice being *able* to get away; even if your friends do ignore your wife!" But the dikes were holding.

"But no women are going, Alma," he explained.

"Fackenthal has no wife to take. It's a man's trip."

"A man's trip. Why are no women going? Because he'd have to ask your wife."

No use trying to argue with her. He only prayed that the dikes would hold until he was finished his breakfast. He had purposely abstained telling her about it until the last minute.

"And why can't they ask your wife? Because she looks like a cook. If he thinks so much of you, enough to take you to Paris, why doesn't he give you enough to let your wife look like a lady?" she demanded.

He did not dare to suggest to her that she might manage a little better. He had begun to doubt her efficiency in that direction. Isabel, too, was poor; she had made no secret of their poverty. And she had been able to transform a piteously forlorn house into a home of charm. She could hold her own, Isabel could, with any one. The difference of a child could not mean much, not a child like little Alma. Her mother made her clothes; Alma never called in a doctor; she opposed every suggestion of a doctor; she had the same rebellions against schools. They lived like beggars, the three of them. Look at their rooms, their table. Alma had not allowed him to keep any of the Wade furniture, nor the silver, even the books. When she found that the house was not theirs, she had been so outraged, so disappointed, he had had to give in to her, had let her sell the belongings, outright, to Fackenthal.

What had she done with that money? She had said, their living expenses. He knew better, now.

What had she added to their home? A second-hand carpet; a new stove; some coarse linen. It was clear that she did not know how to manage. Her trade-people evidently cheated her. But one can't say that to Alma!

"You don't have to take women along with you when you go to Paris," added his wife, sweeping the crumbs from her place into her plate.

It seemed strange that she had never noticed that people don't clear their place that way, not in England; not people one knows. He always waited for her to do it, waited, repelled, fascinated until it was done. Old Krieger did it. That he himself did not do it was perhaps the reason that Alma did.

Anyway, he had broken his news to her. That was ended, for the time. To be begun again that night, when he came home, and tomorrow morning, until he was safely gone.

In the tube, he realized that she had not opposed his going. Resentment, but not opposition she had given him. He had learned something. She doesn't oppose a plan already made; that was her type, to knuckle under to masterfulness. She'd been crushed, quelled at home; brought up to obey. So took the first chance at quelling and crushing herself. If he had not been so cowed at first by her condition, he would not have become so easily the cringing thing he was. If he had it to do over again, he would know how to manage a woman like Alma. He would know enough to keep out of the scrape altogether! Imagine beginning again?

He would never have met Isabel, if he had not come

with Alma to Bird Place. What chance of stumbling over an obscure rose like that in a mob of seven millions? So what was there to moan about? If he'd do it all over again just for the chance of knowing her, of sitting with her once in a while at Hertford House or in Hyde Park, of loving her, why life is not such a rotten show after all—and there you are!

CHAPTER XVII

A BULLDOG

THEY were crossing the Channel by moonlight. Fackenthal was smoking, and saying a word once in a while. The night clear and balmy, warm enough to sit on deck, and smoke and watch the stars.

Fackenthal had proved the perfect companion. Not knowing the exact thing to see, only, or the immediate opera to hear, but knowing when to be quiet, when to drop back and give a man a chance to be alone,—chance to think about it all, and of the woman he loves.

Perhaps it was because of Isabel's nationality that he carried through Paris the sense of her accompanying presence. 'Though he had found she was not wholly French. She had taken something from her English father, a trick of manner, of walking. Or was it an unconscious imitation of the people she lived among?

Twice Fackenthal had allowed him the Louvre, once to have his "raw fill," as he expressed it, alone; and once together, when he had pointed out some of his favourites. Isabel was with him, in the Louvre. She had sat beside him at the opera. Had she not thrilled with him over the introduction of the Old Guard in the new German opera which had taken the

French Capital by storm? And on the river; on the train going to St. Cloud; on the balcony of the little restaurant where they had looked down upon a quaint, flower-crowded garden and a green-bordered stream, hadn't she been with him, telling him what she thought about it all?

She was with him now, crossing the Channel with him, sitting by him in the moonlight, watching the star-sprinkled sky. And quiet, like Fackenthal; letting her mind meet his, halfway.

As the British coast ran to meet them, he realized that he would have to remind himself to tell her of his impressions, so convincingly present had she been with him. At Paris: St. Cloud, Versailles.

Like moonlight, Isabel was. Moonlight is not cold; it is kindly, softening everything it touches. It makes everything seem better than it is; it turns London streets and dingy London houses into beauty. Just the way Isabel does. Covers sour old walls with roses. Silvers life, she does. Makes a man want to live up to her ideal of him.

A stimulating thing, faith is. Fackenthal also had faith in him. Even if he did not want to creep out of his groove to please Isabel, for his own sake, he would want to do it for Mr. Fackenthal.

"Pretty soon home, Wade. London and work days." Fackenthal met his eyes.

"Yes, but stored up memories!" returned Wade.

With each successive step in the journey his gratitude to his thoughtful friend increased. So easy had it been for Fackenthal to insist on talking over the things they had seen! But in the train he smoked

and read; commenting once in a while on the news of the periodicals; and dozed and smoked again. Not noticing his companion's silence, not challenging it.

Picture after picture was crossing Graeme's inner vision; the crowded, tree-lined streets; the cafés; the busy, piquante faces; the sunlight on the river,—sunlight and moonlight every instant of Paris! He wanted to fix those impressions, for he would probably never go back there,—he pulled himself up sharply. Say a thing is impossible, that you can't do it, and it's good betting that you never will. A week ago, he would have said this could never happen, and here he was sitting opposite Fackenthal, his train steaming into London, with Paris achieved, an actual memory!

Only four days ago he had left Charing Cross station, and here he was back again, a man made over as it were. Able to face Bird Place with serenity, pleasure even, because he was to pass Her door.

Everything dating from the dazed fumbling that night in the fog. Even this trip, Fackenthal's interest in him, because of that night, because of Isabel.

"The door is on the latch!"

He could see the room of roses.

"I always knew it would happen in fog like this!" Strange how real her voice was! As soon as he realized that he was looking at her, she had a trick of melting away. If he could only see her steadily, without that shock of knowing he was seeing her! Perhaps then he could keep her standing there. He must teach himself not to say: Why, I am really seeing her, really hearing her voice!

"Speak to me again, Isabel!"

"Oh, no, not if you have any inside of you!" And then gone again, like a mist, like moonlight swept behind the fog.

Fackenthal and the other two occupants of the compartment were beginning to bestir themselves. Charging Cross in a minute, and the wonder trip ended. But not gone. Not when you've learned the secret of keeping things with you; Jove, that's what the expression "mind's eye" means. The mind's eye!

"Well, it's been a good time, Wade," Fackenthal said affectionately as they separated, Graeme to take the tube, and Fackenthal his car which Wade refused to share, for it would carry him out of his way. "And you've been a bully companion."

All Graeme could stammer was that it had been wonderful, and that he didn't know how to thank him.

London again; apparently the same rut. Going to make the same motions, morning and evening going home to sleep, or to eat with his family; going down to the office each day, externally the same Wade Graeme. But everything changed, himself changed. Fackenthal had seen it, too. He had said in Paris: "Keep up the fight, Wade. Your mother would be proud of you, too, my boy."

He had known all the time that Fackenthal was drawing him out. But why analyze or be self-conscious when one is having the bulliest man-time ever hoped for? He was remembering a look on Fackenthal's face. He had heard a low chuckle, and had looked up to catch Fackenthal smiling, as though pleased.

"You look just like a bulldog when you stiffen

your jaw like that. As though you could fight the whole of London."

"I feel that way," he had answered, and they had fallen quiet again on the river-boat, Fackenthal smoking, dozing, he himself pretending to doze.

He would soon be under Isabel's window. In a few minutes he would be winging her a good-night, almost a good-morning now, up to her window-boxes.

Then his own home. But with a stout courage to face it and get through with it. He let himself into the dark hall, and was stooping to unlace his shoes when Fackenthal's words recurred to him. A bulldog? He would not take off his shoes. He would walk upstairs in his own house like a man, not like a craven who has done something wrong.

Alma, he thought, was asleep. But as he crept into bed her voice from the darkness startled him. For he was thinking himself back on the Channel; on the boat bathed in moonlight; he was thinking of Fackenthal and Isabel—

"You've been drinking."

He had. Hours before. On the boat; a scotch and soda. Why should he deny it?

"Pretending to go away for a three day trip. Staying away five, and coming home to your wife with a breath like that!"

Beginning again. You need to have a bulldog courage all right, Wade Graeme!

"No sense of shame. Can't even say you are ashamed or sorry. Me staying at home, drudging like a servant. And *you* can go to Paris!"

He wanted to say that she too could go if any one

liked her well enough to ask her! Was it his fault that she had no friends? The old groove, berating her in his mind, using up his mind with bitterness and fault finding. Almost as bad thinking it, as letting yourself go and saying it;—the way she does!

He listened to a little more of it, and then got up.

“Any more blankets in this house?”

“In the press. In the hall. Are you cold? I shouldn’t think you’d be *cold*—”

He was fumbling in the dark for matches. Her voice followed him out into the hall, upbraiding, complaining, pitying herself.

Suddenly she discovered that he was going downstairs.

“Where are you going?” she cried.

“I am going,” said Graeme, “to try to sleep. But not with you. Never again.”

That night he slept on the parlour floor.

CHAPTER XVIII

OVERTONES

THE winter which followed was a period of growth for the "finished" clerk of Fackenthal, Knight and Company, Ltd. He was spending four or five nights a week at the office, often writing late into the night; sometimes calmly; sometimes possessed by a fury of haste. Every time he thought of the years lost, he would fall into a panic of work; reading, studying voraciously, during the noon hours, of the five working days when he did not meet Isabel, or during the two home evenings, before the cold grate, or in his newly acquired cubicle of a room that had been little Alma's.

His silent declaration of freedom was the cheap bedroom set, shoddy as well as shabby, which he had found in a second-hand shop on Haberdasher Street: a bed, dresser, a mattress. He had had to pay more than he had intended because that particular store was willing to deliver on Sunday, and he wanted the change made during Alma's absence.

He staid home from church that day. Before the furniture arrived, he had moved the child's crib from the tiny room. He had the new pieces installed there before Alma returned from the late communion service. The carrier received an unexpectedly fat gratuity because his promise had been kept.

Graeme verified that day an earlier discovery. Alma accepted changes carried off in that high-handed way; that was the system to which she was trained. Perhaps, he reflected, that was the reason she so despised him; only half a man must he have seemed after the rough domination of old Krieger.

To avoid scenes, he told himself again, he had let himself seem a coward, he had knuckled under. No longer would he knuckle under. He had learned his lesson; and from her. He was going to subtract his usual allowance for 'bus fares and meals; was going to subtract also the price of the furnishings, and tell her so. Before bringing home his salary, he was going to do that. Else she would suspect his liberty fund; would begin to demand it.

He did not wither, he found, under her silent scorn, or later, under her spoken criticism. Didn't mind even her saying that she would send the things back, for he alone knew where they had come from. She told him that he had been cheated, that the bed would fall with him some night. He hadn't bought the things, he told her, because they were works of art!

A few weeks later, the purchase was augmented: a small table and a reading lamp nobody else would have paid money for were sent to Bird Place. He listened cheerfully to his wife's scoffing.

Called it "getting fancy"! Thought it getting fancy to keep one's mind fed!

Each night reminded him that it was not a perfect arrangement. The mattress was hard, and caved in in the middle. There were not enough covers to keep three beds going, and he was often cold; slept cold.

He had to pass through her room in order to get to his. But he had determined not to let little thorns like these prick his satisfaction.

He ordered the oil for the lamp. He told Alma that he would attend to the filling of the lamp, and that once he had paid for the oil; that it was not put on her bill.

"I don't have bills," she had curtly stated. "I pay as I go. I get things cheaper for cash, and it's easy to carry the things we're able to buy."

Ironical disdain from Alma, but no row. It occurred to him that the change carried the same relief to her. An insult, at first it had seemed. But who would wish to watch the cowed creepings, the daily humiliations of one's prisoner?

It was in the new room that he discovered he was not old. He had been with Isabel at noon; had been humbled again by the adoration in her lovely eyes. What, he had asked himself, after he had left her, what could she see in him worth loving, in the aging, routine clerk of wool and goat's hair? She must love the thing she couldn't see, loved perhaps in *spite* of his old, stooping body!

The thought followed him through the day. It was with him when he closed his door that night. He asked the new mirror what she could see in him?

The youth of Surrey looked back at him; the man of the Karroo. Shoulders straightening up? Youth, animation in those eyes? Clear, English blue eyes. Clean chiselled features, like the Wades. All the family pictures showed that sharp outlining, the same sensitive mouth and chin. Hair, dark and straight,

like his mother's. He looked like her; not handsome like her, but thoroughbred, and clean-looking. He recognized a new quality in the gaze from the mirror. Expectant, that was it. That was what had changed him. It is when you stop expecting opportunity, or joy, that age comes to you!

Other people, he found, were recognizing the change in him. He got it from the appraising, approving glances of his fellow clerks, from Alma's silent scorn, or from her comment when he bought a new tie, or asked her if she would press his trousers?

Thought he was getting fancy? Thought she had to look out for the young husband who was willing to keep his wife in the kitchen? But here he pulled himself up sharply. He was not to let himself dwell on her sarcasms, imagine her broodings. It was the old habit which subtracted from his imagination. His chance was to press forward—to waste no more precious time on what couldn't be changed. For Alma was changeless.

As for a profession, he studied that winter. Was it not indeed a profession, he would demand of himself, when alone in the rest room at Fetter Lane, that he was fitting himself for? If he could write well enough to be paid for his margin hours, why not later give his whole time to the task he loved? Wasn't he a failure as a clerk?

Everything he wished to write about demanded more information, called for late hours of deep digging in the libraries. He was rusty, he told himself, behind in everything. The poetry article was postponed because of the months of work it would involve,

and because those newspaper fellows wanted more timely, vital stuff. They liked his insurgent material; he was being directed to a distinct field.

The *Globe* articles had been the directing force. They had shown him, too, not only his capacity but his limitations. He would not be a popular writer; his audience would be that of the discontents, of the men and women who were surveying intensely the whole system of human customs: of democracy; of socialism; of peace; capitalism and labour; of the duty of the state to the individual as well as its converse. He added, later, marriage to the list, as one of the fagots of the social unrest.

That is the way, he renewed the discovery, that history works. Dissatisfactions piling up like loose fagots, unrelated fagots, each conscious of itself as the sole cause or cure of all the world misery! And then one day, whiff! some one drops a match, and the whole pile blazes up together.

Hobbs introduced him to his crowd, Korniloff and his Russian sweetheart, who was recognized as his wife by that easy crowd; Hirschler, the fiery little Jew with the red hair; Laflin, the long-haired poet of the dissatisfied; Garnett Peckham and the rest. These had passed him on to other groups; he was urged to attend their meetings, and to join clubs. He found them all astonishingly well-read.

It surprised him, therefore, to find them taking his easy frothings seriously. His introductions began to give him the explanation: "Writes for the *Globe*, a friend of Jepson's." Jepson, he learned, was claimed to be an unlabelled socialist. Immense respect was

paid the *Globe*. The *Globe*, he heard on every side, was free.

He, too, was free, was going to be free. That was why he must resign himself to small cheques and small audiences. The great mass of readers want soothing-syrup, doesn't want to be roused too early, nor to have the pleasure of its sunny day spoiled. It wants to be fooled, in fact.

Well, he wasn't going to play court fool! Out of his margin, of freedom, came his writing. He was going to keep it free.

His new friends beckoned him to shabby halls and basements; they were also shabby. Had he not espoused the cause of the shabby? He attended conferences of socialists, of Homerulers; of labour groups; of suffragettes, all equally interesting to him, but people, he thought, were silly to get so excited over everything. Why, wasn't it all in sight, all the reforms they were howling for? What do a dozen years signify to history?

Ridicule them, the conservatives, the aristocrats, if they please, but let the people wake up some morning in a bad mood, let something happen to the food supply—England always twenty-four hours from starvation,—and it would be theirs what they wanted, the hardfaced women, the brogue speaking brethren, labour groups, all of them!

In December, Jepson, returning an undesired manuscript, attached a memorandum suggesting that he try his hand at fiction. "*That* is what this suggests to me," he wrote. "It's that sort of material."

He had been trying his hand at it, surreptitiously.

But he had found it altogether a different matter, putting together a fiction story. His machinery creaked. He needed more than style and machinery; imagination or experience, or both, he should have. And he was behind in his reading there, too. He had to discover the modern authors, to see what was being done. It seemed like playing, to stay downtown until midnight, reading Galsworthy, or Dostoievesky. Isabel could help him in the new field prodigiously, did he want to tell her about it. But it was too soon. He wasn't sure enough yet. He told her, instead, of the verses he was dabbling at; easy, short outbursts which one can mould into form in the subway or 'busses; outlets which do not demand preliminary reading, but which keep the rivers of thought clear.

He told her, too, of the new friends he was making, and, instantly, they became hers, Murphy, Hannigan, Hirschler, the little red-haired Jew, Garnett Peckham, Korniloff the Russian and his Marie Lezynsky who could not be his wife because there was one already, one who did not believe in divorce, though she refused to live with Korniloff. Isabel was especially interested in the young Russians. He had to describe Marie Lezynsky.

Because she could not go to such meetings, being the wife of a man who did not approve of them, Graeme had to bring them to her; he reported the talks he heard, brought her names of books the vivid groups were reading, or quoting. Having leisure, her reading forged ahead of his. In turn, she told him what the books were saying, and which ones he

must really read for himself. Wonderful, it was to have Isabel to share it all with!

He visited the Korniloffs one Sunday, in their cheap apartment at Blackheath. He was deeply disturbed for weeks. If he admired the Russian for his courage and his truth, why didn't he similarly defy convention? To Isabel, this visit was meagrely reported.

"Honourable people, not like Marie and me," the Russian had confided, as they walked together in the afternoon, "would hide their love, and lie about it. If they couldn't get a divorce, they would pretend they didn't want one. Maries hidden all over London. Is it fair to the woman? Does it help any one else? Push the world a bit further? Make the laws better? We say: No, Marie and I. We snap our fingers, so! If everybody stopped lying about it, wouldn't it be a better world?"

The thought of the apartment at Blackheath kept recurring to him. He knew the way Isabel would make it look—not recklessly barbaric, like Marie's, nor Bohemian. It wouldn't be dusty, nor ash-covered. The thought intruded between himself and his writing. Finally, he dedicated an evening, and ended that temptation. Expose a woman like Isabel to the publicity that Blood and Alma would pitilessly turn upon them? Isolate her in the Korniloff set? Isabel had not grown up in the easy circles of Petrograd! But it was a long time before he would return to the Blackheath hospitality.

"He likes not my cooking, no?" shrugged Marie, each time they met. Each time, he had to control the impulse to tell her about Isabel.

Their own weekly meetings, always the swiftest half hour of the twenty-four, were housed now, in the galleries. Hyde Park and Kensington were for a long time yet too cold for Isabel. But while the winter months were wearing themselves away, they liked to talk about the spring.

Graeme began to plan a trip of celebration, a spring celebration. While the lilacs were in bloom, and the late blossoming irises and violets still lingered, they would spend a whole day at Hampton Court, coming home by Kew.

It was impossible, she said, at first. *He* was always home on Sundays, and that was Wade's only day of freedom.

"I'll take a special holiday," he declared. Go down to Kew in lilac-time—why, of course, they should go there together!

It became a day of postponed opportunity, their calendar pivoting on that day of spring. No time to tell her that? why then at Kew! Going to take his poems to her then. Every topic interrupted by the clamouring London clocks was consigned to that unnamed day in spring.

Breathless, those precious meetings! Always hurrying back to a desk, to a snatched sandwich and the waiting columns of wool and goat's hair! But wildly, inexpressibly sweet, those hastened visits were. He owed everything to them!

The way she had of adding her mind to his, pushing, as it were, against an obstacle in his path, and shoving it out of the way! Way she had of meeting

his thought, on the wing, and sending it back richer! His wonderful Isabel!

Inadvertent sentences were revealing to him her nervousness. "It was less conspicuous," she said one day, "at Hyde Park." And another time: "Here, in the galleries, people stare so if *you* are not staring at a guidebook or at marbles."

Once she said: "Guards look at you so queerly! They look at you if you're alone, and harder, when a man joins you whom they have seen with you before. Knowing perfectly well that he is not your husband. A husband meeting you like that, eagerly, in a gallery, if he has just said good-bye to you an hour or so before, at breakfast?"

"Or so loath to leave you, with only a few hours before another meeting at the dinner table!" matched Wade, to watch the colour come to her cheeks, and was shocked to see the tears mount to her eyes, instead.

"Everybody," he added swiftly, to make her smile, "everybody wants to look at you. Why shouldn't they? You don't know how lovely you are, Isabel!"

Expect Isabel to accept without daily flinching, the life of a Marie Lezynsky?

And *he* would accept life on no less honest terms than Korniloff, and there you are!

Before the winter was quite done with its rigours, she persuaded him to resume the meetings at Hyde Park. The Achilles statue seemed to be offering a welcome to them when they came; a gentle sun was shining—

Any two people can drift at lunchtime into a park,

and take a penny seat without others questioning their right to be there. Not strange at all to find one's seat shared by some one else. And if she moves to give one room, or drops a paper or book that one must pick up for her, what more natural than to find oneself speaking of the approach of spring, or of the book being held in one's hand? Shabby sweethearts are always meeting in a park! No one paying any attention, to shabby folk, in a park.

"Except," said Isabel one day, "except that old woman in the old black dress, and the untrimmed hat. Have you noticed how she hangs around, as though she were trying to hear what we say?"

"I never see any one else when I'm with you," responded Graeme.

"I'm serious."

"I'm more serious."

"She never seems to look at us, to see us, but she prowls so near us! I've been watching her. Before you came. She listens to other people, too. She never hangs around any one who is alone."

"It mustn't get on your nerves, Isabel, our meeting. Don't you really think it is of a piece with your fear of the guides, dear?"

"It isn't just us," persisted Isabel. "Watch her, prowling. She is heading here now. Go right on talking. But watch her, out of the corner of your eye."

"I have heard of poor wretches who earn a living that way, ferreting out people's secrets, sad and naughty secrets, and selling their silence, blackmail

you know. Here; in London parks and theatres. But obviously, we have no money. We are safe from that sort of thing."

"Watch her now," whispered Isabel.

The old woman was creeping near them, staring at the ground. As though she had lost something; bent over; searching. Her gait suggested feebleness. She looked the sickly relict; out for sun and possible pickings.

"And that is most likely her business," decided Wade. "People are always leaving things, always forgetting umbrellas, and handkerchiefs. A high class ragpicker, probably. We needn't be afraid of her. If you would like, though, we could meet somewhere else for awhile. Kensington?"

"It's farther for you, and your time is so short."

"Short, indeed! No time to begin anything. All beginnings! Everything waiting for Kew!"

Though she had told him to watch the old woman, he left that for Isabel, for he himself was watching her. It had struck him that she was unusually pensive that day. As though the brave mask were still there, but no smiles were underneath! He exerted himself to interest her, to get her mind off the worries she was determined to keep to herself. Several times her pretty laugh answered him.

But on the way back to the office, he was analyzing the merry responses of his Isabel, wondering why he had felt a sadness, and asking himself if perhaps it was only that he had that day more truly caught her overtones. Was not always that smile of hers like

winter sunshine? Plucky sort, Isabel! Did his patience seem bloodless to her? He was going to find out, at Kew!

He asked her, though, before then. What did she think about a man's duty, first? Could it be decently chucked for a new, if closer interest? About work, writing, too. Was he perhaps wrong, did it seem wrong to her, his determination to keep his writing free?

More than anything he wanted from life, was her happiness, which meant her freedom. But it had to be a real freedom; she had to be placed far enough away to be out of *his* reach. But that would take money. Was there anything she thought he could do, should do, things she could see, and he didn't? Write the stuff they call potboilers, things which don't require study to prepare, yet don't get you anywhere? Perhaps he could write the cheap sort of stuff one sees in the cheap journals; perhaps he couldn't. He'd read that some people make a jolly failure of it. He fancied it was just a trick, of splitting up ideas into small pieces, and letting one's self rip! But what does it mean to one? Ruins one style, and for what? But he had to know something from her. Was it so hard for her, staying, should he give up the bigger chance, or was it bearable?

Oh, it was bearable! He must surely go on studying, getting ahead. He must not write drivel. Suppose he failed drivelling? Lost the *Globe*, Jepson's confidence, Mr. Fackenthal's—fell into a worse kind of rut!

"You are such a comfort, Isabel, dear!"

But afterwards, again her overtones! The wistfulness which had somehow crept to him! Bearable! Bearable!

"Surely," she cried, "that was snow on my face! It is snowing! Who said spring was here?"

"I'm thinking 'damn!' The papers did say this morning that we were in for a storm. But I'm only just here, and the snow sends you home! Ride down with me! It isn't fair, only five minutes out of a week!"

She went all the way to Fleet Street with him, keeping the same direction for a few squares after he left her, lest any one, old woman, or another, had been watching them.

In the crowded 'bus, both of them were quiet. Both of them thinking the same thoughts? He wondered, and turned to get a look at her, catch her off guard. Her sweet smile was ready for him. Thinking of the spring which was lagging? Of the lilacs and the river? Of the day they were to spend together, one out of a lifetime. With nobody listening, no shabby, loot-picking women with curious ears and rusty untrimmed hats! Far from those clamouring clocks of London! Their one day!

Snowclouds now blowing in shamelessly; snowclouds. Winter still regnant; spring a long way off!

It had to be spring, achieved, before he and Isabel claimed their holiday. They would not force it; forcing it would spoil it. Kew in the rain, or the cold winds blowing? Having to crowd close to people in 'busses and boats?

The scene was to be set for their day, when Pippa

passes! Their day of stored rebellions! Sybarites, epicures, they were, about that day at Kew. Their precious truancy must not be chilled by weather. Before, for days before, sunshine, to bring out the lagging almond blossom and the yet unlocked lilac-blooms. Sunshine that day on the river, and for that pageant of wild flowers! Of course, they must see Hampton Court and Kew in their bridal array; the bursting of early buds; the earth's resurrection.

“It was surely worth waiting for!”

CHAPTER XIX

SPRING AND YOUTH

SPRING came running upon London, cutting capers like a rough, blustering boy; nothing tender about it yet, nor romantic. It was still impish, finding sport in reddening noses, in caricatures of wind-blown clothes, of hats whirling through space like a falling star, costing each owner a seat on the 'bus, if happily not a hat, perhaps! But at least, the thin-blooded sighed, it was here, and the long winter was ended. Soon it would be getting warmer. The magic days were on the way.

Those whom the gods seemed to love were letting their fancy play in Wales, in Scotland, or on the beaches; they were dreaming of boating, of tennis and polo and golf, and planning new styles of clothes. Those forgotten by the gods were being thankful that the coal bills would not be so heavy, promising their families a trip to the city parks, or even, if luck were kind, and no doctor's bills had to be again incurred, a journey to Hampton Court or Kew.

Every time they met, Graeme and Isabel added fresh expectations for their day at Kew. All the unfinished topics were to be completed there, all the hurried histories then to be leisurely compared. Graeme had a new plan, he told Isabel, for her future. They

were going to discuss it, lengthily, on the river. But this much, now!

He wanted to get her away from her life; she must know that, didn't she? But how could he do it, now? He wasn't earning nearly enough yet. But that was his objective. As soon as his writing began to bring in something, if not much, at least surely and steadily, he was going to send her away somewhere, hide her, care for her. He wanted her to be relying on him for that, not letting herself get despondent or hopeless. He was afraid she had been letting worries nag her lately. Could she trust him? Had she faith enough in him to know that he was planning for both their lives, for her freedom as well as his? And moreover, could she believe that much as he loved her it was possible for him to take her away, from her husband, going out of her life himself, except to love her always, and to write her as often as she would let him?

"But I couldn't accept that," she argued. How could she take money from him, like that?

He ridiculed her, though tenderly. "How we have to cling to the old notions! Must it be a bargain, an arrangement! Why can't a man help a woman as freely as though she were a man, Isabel? Why can't a man and woman who love each other in the best sense, why can't they steer free of the old material superstitions? I believe, Isabel, if we should abolish marriage as we know it, today, we would at once set about to make new ironclad conditions of money and property. It's all based on that, you know. The joy of working for you would be my reward. Would it

be harder, taking money from me, than—" He stopped abruptly, seeing the ashamed colour flood her face. He was painfully conscious that she turned her head from him that he might not see the tears which had started to her eyes.

"Isn't it all befogged," he pleaded to the averted head, "the truth, the ideas we stand in awe of?"

"The money part always is hard," her face was still turned from him. "I'm going to tell you sometime, maybe at Kew, why it is so hard."

They had so many things to tell one another! Her eyes were stealing back to his. "A day will be too short!" Her expression halted him a moment, then he rushed on. "Will you be thinking out the plan? It may be a long time off, but won't it give you more courage to meet the days, Isabel?"

"There is no place in England you could hide me. He would find me. He's like that. He never stops till he finds what he has lost. No place you could hide me," she reiterated.

"Then it doesn't have to be England. Why not France? Why, of course, Paris! He would never find you there."

She was so still that he wondered why. She sat silent, staring at the trees which were beginning to cover their stark outlines with prophecies of leaves or swelling buds. He could not see her eyes again, only the smooth curve of cheek and adorable chin. After a few minutes had passed, she asked him if she were never to see him? Would he never come to see her over there?

"It would depend," he hesitated, watching what he

could of her face, "it would depend on how much I earn. Oh, once in awhile, of course. And I would write—"

"Of course, you would write, every day, if it were only a line. I want to know about your life, to be in it every minute. I was just thinking about what you said a few minutes ago, why a man should help a woman as freely as though she were a man. A man would let another man—start him. I'd be willing for that. It won't cost as much as you think, helping me. Getting me started. Working, of course, too. I've often wanted to—but I had no way of getting started. I've thought so much about it, that part of it, the money part. Women ought to be independent, it should be easy for women to be independent, that's the heart of the problem; we will talk about that some day!"

"At Kew," he wheedled, to bring her eyes back to him, and there they were, creeping slowly back to him. "We'll talk about everything, that day on the river. I want to show off to you, then, that there is one thing I can really do well; that I can row!"

Her eyes were disturbing. They were telling him that they thought he could do everything well.

Strange to have any one look at him like that! As though he amounted to something. As though she adored him, Wade Graeme!

Subduing his pulse, he went back to his program, blocking it out for her. His hour was nearly past. She was to meet him at Chelsea, the Friday of the following week, only five days away now. They would meet on the boat, as though a casual happening.

Then they would go to Hampton Court, or wherever the fancy led them. No cut and dried imprisoning plans for them, that one wonderful day! If by chance they saw any one they knew, they could separate, as though chance fellow-travellers. If such an untoward thing as that should happen, they could go on alone, each of them, to Kew. Suppose they agreed to that now? No matter what happened during the day to separate them, they would go at once to Kew?

And wait there until the other came.

They were so engrossed, Isabel listening, absorbed, Graeme busily working out the program, that neither one of them noticed the little woman with the untrimmed rusty hat when she slipped into the seat next to Isabel. She had sidled up, noiselessly, as though looking on the ground for something she had dropped. Graeme saw her, he remembered later, saw her without giving her a thought. Few people, he told Isabel afterwards, would give a second glance to the obscure humble figure, hunting, as she seemed, through the dust for a dropped penny.

"If the unforeseen should happen," he reminded her, "they would go back, she to Bird Place, he to the office, after waiting oh, not more than two hours? But nothing," he added, "was going to happen. Everything was going to be all right, their beautiful day. It was to be Friday because that was his lodge night, wasn't that the reason they had chosen Friday?"

"He almost always takes dinner downtown, on Fridays," contributed Isabel, guiltily crimsoning.

"Is there any reason why we shouldn't meet, on the river, once in a lifetime, why I should not steal a day

from the office, the first in eight years?" He was trying to make her smile, to look happy before he left her. He couldn't leave her with that shamed, unhappy flush on her face! They weren't planning anything to be ashamed of. No reason they could not tell Alma and Blood what they were planning if custom had not trained them into thinking that married people should never go anywhere unless together, that anything else is wrong. Fancy telling either Alma or Blood that they were planning a Puritanic jaunt! Why, neither of them would believe it! So, there you are!

"You forget your trip to Paris!"

"That was different, going with my chief. Altogether different!"

His shoulders squared as he rose looking down upon her sweet, uplifted face. Discovering all over again how superlatively sweet she was, how miraculous her love. He could never get stale to their astonishing relation. Her sympathy, her sweetness, her memory of everything which concerned him, always touched him, humbled him. How wonderful it was! He must always compare her loving trust with Alma's lack of it, Alma whose memory was used only to trap and confound him.

No relation, the world would say, if it believed what was the truth; what was going to be the truth. Just loving one another, believing in one another, and helping one another. She was the poetry of his else drab life, she was the grace, the stimulus, the music. Away from her, time was reckoned by their last meet-

ing, and the next. Why was it then, that with her he could be so calm, so elder-brotherly, for it was not that way he loved her! As though they had spent years together, long understanding the other, long thinking together, so that when apart, each was only half alive. When together, satisfied; talking of little things; of prosaic plans; of simple hopes and fears.

He told himself, looking down on her, scanning the dark shadows on the cheeks which were too thin for health but not for beauty, that he was glad for her sake that spring was at last come. A fear was pressing on him. Perhaps the friendship which had given such pride, such strength to him was bearing too hard upon her? Had he brought to her, perhaps, only the unrest of realization?

"If I thought so—" he lowered.

"What would you do, then? Only I haven't the earliest idea what it's all about," she confided to his sober eyes.

"I don't know." He kept staring at her. For what could he do without her? Could he conceive of life, now, without her, once having sensed the richness of life with her, the girl who had got caught in the fibres of his life? She was his work, the best of it, and his anchor. She was his beacon light, his refuge. She was all the things he had dreamed of, as a boy; and later, as a man, riding over the Karroo, or dreaming, at night, on his back, watching the stars wheel. How could he let her go?

"My wireless isn't working. I don't know what it is you would or wouldn't do!"

"Just the precipice I reach once in awhile," he evaded. She knew, indeed, what he meant by the precipice!

It was late! He must be going. Did she remember it all? They would meet at the boat; separate, if they met any one; and returning, they would leave the boat at Chelsea, taking the rest of the trip by 'bus, as strangers, sitting side by side; greedy he was for the last scrap of the day, that twilight ride into London. To the casual observer, and did they know many others? but an accidental meeting on the top of a London 'bus.

She watched him out of sight. But when she rose to go, her neighbour, the little woman of the untrimmed, rusty hat, rose too, and drawing close, thrust her wizened face close to Isabel's.

Her highpitched whisper whistled in Isabel's frightened ear: "Going to tell the 'usband of the naughty, pretty lady! She was. Hit would take money, begging her not to. Hit would. The lady wouldn't want 'er 'usband to know!"

Shaking, irresolute, Isabel stood for a moment, looking to see if any one had heard, if any one were watching her. Incredible, that this should be happening to her! Things like that never happen to people like her! Incredibly vulgar and terrifying! She was afraid to run away, for the old woman might make a scene in the park, she hated to have to listen to the hoarse innuendoes of the professional eavesdropper, for that she knew now she must be.

'Though her reason told her that the woman would not know where she lived, would not know where her

husband worked, or what his name was, still there was a chance that she had already fortified herself with that knowledge. How did she know but that she had been followed home from one of these meetings with Wade? One of these sweet, holy meetings with Wade! It shook her with indignation the thought that any one would dare impute evil to these innocent talks. But were they innocent? Custom makes it wrong for a woman to meet by design another woman's husband. Would her husband think it innocent? Why, then, was she shaking with terror for fear that he would be told?

The wrinkled face pushed closer to her own.

"Want to 'ave the 'usband know hof the good-looking lover, has 'ow they were planning to give 'im the slip? She didn't want to do that. Two pounds will let you horf!"

"But I haven't that much, not nearly," cried Isabel, crushed. If she had it, she would give it gladly to get away, to get free of this! How could she convince the terrible old woman that she did not have it, that she never had that much money at one time?

"You 'ave, Hi know. That pretty purse of yours! 'E horter whip you, a child like you, so knowing! Two pounds!"

"I really haven't it!" wailed Isabel. "I've only three shillings."

"Then the 'usband 'as hit," said the old woman. A sudden, desperate idea came to Isabel.

"But—I've got it, at home! I'll give it to you, there, if you'll come with me!"

The penny hunter looked at her dubiously, as

though suspecting a trick. She wasn't going to be tricked by a baby like that!

"Come home with me. No one's home at this time. I'll give it to you, there," repeated Isabel.

She started off, a little in advance of the eaves-dropper who was still suspiciously eyeing her. Then, as Isabel kept on walking, she hastened after her.

When she reached the street, Isabel turned. "We'll take a 'bus."

"Which one?"

"Not this one." For she had to let at least one go by. It would be too obvious pretending to want the first one that came. The old woman would see through that.

She let several pass her. A group of people were standing near them. She saw a 'bus bearing down on them, and many of the group moving forward for it. This was her chance, a desperate one, she knew.

"This is ours." She pushed as though to get ahead of the crush. At the step, she turned suddenly, taking the old woman's elbow, and helping her to mount. Just as she had planned, those she had outstripped came in between her and the old woman. She stumbled, as though she had turned her ankle. She made helpless gestures, as though trying to regain her place. She let herself be elbowed away.

She prayed for the 'bus to start. For she could see the woman trying to push her way through the in-going stream. She could see her wrangling, struggling to get off, and the 'bus starting. Isabel turned, and like a frightened rabbit ran in the opposite direction.

A 'bus was following her. She ran to the next stop-

ping place, and got aboard, breathless, just as it started.

The old woman was nowhere to be seen.

She changed 'busses several times on her way home. But nowhere did she see the terrible old woman in the untrimmed hat. In the tube, and on the street, at the crossings, she kept looking fearfully over her shoulder to see if any one were shadowing her. No one seemed to be following her!

Several times, she thought of writing to Wade; suggesting that they change the day, and place. But Wade always laughed at her fears. London was not a village, he would say. How would the old woman know who she was?

Every time her husband came home, she would look at him fearfully to see if he had been told. She felt sure that she would know if he had been told. He would try to trap her, or make some other plan for Friday.

On Thursday, tremulously, she told him that she was going into the suburbs the next afternoon, to see the blossoms. Everything depended on that next minute, all the plans they had been making through the long winter weeks. She held her breath until he spoke.

He was astonishingly complacent about it. He asked her if that meant she might be late getting home?

She thought that she might be late getting home! She wondered if people who really sin feel any worse than that! She had chosen a moment when he was reading his paper, and she was gathering up the din-

ner dishes to take them into the kitchen. She did not know whether he were looking at her or not; she wanted to look at him, to see, but dared not. She knew her face was crimson.

"Friday night's lodge night," he said. And that was all.

Nothing more said about it. It had been astonishingly easy. He did not allude to it again, not before the fire, when he had finished reading the paper, and turned an odd, contemplative stare upon her, as though discovering how really pretty she was, nor when they were getting ready for bed. He must have forgotten it, she thought.

As she was brushing her hair, he came up behind her, and looked in the mirror at the reflected girliness. He held out his arms to her. "Getting to be some looker, Isabel!"

She shivered.

But at least, he did not oppose her taking a trip into the country. Nothing had been said to him. The old woman did not know who she was. Things like that don't happen to poor people, as Wade said. They can't pay enough to make it worth while. But they would not go to the Achilles statue any more. They would have to find a new meeting-place.

CHAPTER XX

“COME DOWN TO KEW!”

THEY met, the following Friday morning, at Chelsea, self-consciously, both of them, for this was a new sort of meeting. It savoured of running away. As though, he thought, they were going to the continent, to Italy; to bury themselves in America. All of the things they were not going to do were in his mind as he saw her coming towards him. Not late. He had been afraid that she might have to be late.

He discovered his two tickets in his hand. Openly waiting for her, forgetting to be clandestine, so relieved that she did not have to be late!

She did not meet his eyes in the old, frank way. Had she had a hard time getting away? Did she have to lie, too, to explain the day's absence? He thought it was that which was clouding her eyes. She liked truth as much as he did. Nothing, they had often said, was worth lying for. But when it's only one day out of a lifetime that you are to have together—still, that would not take the sting of reproach away from his Isabel.

Run away with that type of woman to the continent? To give *happiness*, that sort of life which would mean one lie after another, until tongue and soul grew callous? Outcasts, they would be willing to be,

for each other, if that were the sum and end of it. But it wouldn't be the end of it. Every day a new lie, and by and by, perhaps lying to each other! Not that. Not that for Isabel.

They went aboard solemnly, finding seats on the deck, and sitting beside one another in constrained, conscious silence. And they had so much to say to each other! So much to say that one day was not enough. And here they were losing it, afraid to begin!

Two tickets, connoting spring, and youth, and a day on the river! Budding spring and youthful revolt! The day life owed them!

The face felt new which turned to her demanding that Isabel look at him!

Her face was new, too! Radiance emerging from her shyness. It was something older and sadder than shyness, he discovered, getting the truth from her face, or from their sixth mutual sense of sympathy. He saw her smile at him with deliberation. He knew what she was saying to herself: that she was not going to spoil his great day for him. A fine self-control had Isabel!

Their day! Spring here at last, and they on their way to Kew!

Their eyes met with a shock. Something went wrong with his breathing. He felt as though he had been running. He found himself saying that he was glad she was late, not knowing until her laugh rang out that he had not said that he was glad she was not late. Then the echo of his words came to him. Wonderful to be laughing aloud with Isabel!

He realized then that he had never heard her laugh before. It was a short, sweet cadence, ending abruptly, as though unpractised. His Isabel! If he could only bring laughter into her life! Nothing he wanted to do so much as that; to give her the joy that does not turn to ashes. But he could never give her that. England, and custom, and Alma, were against it. England and Alma would say “Cleave only unto Alma.” And custom would say: Ashes, if you must, but lie about it, cover it up.

Those were not the thoughts for their day on the river! He was going to match her self-control.

Never, he thought, had he seen her so beautiful. And now that the influence of the home-leaving was gone, suddenly electric, triumphant. Her eyes, meeting his, were radiant, disquieting.

He had noticed the freshness of her dress; had she made a new dress for Kew? He had seen her slender ankles as she had sped up the gang-plank, stockings matching her low shoes; he now realized her hat, lilacs on a grey straw; of course, lilacs for Kew!

Her beauty abashed him. He wondered why it made her happy to hear him stammering like a routed schoolboy?

Their seats were in front. Isabel explained that she liked to watch the landscape being made, not all finished, and running away from her! He had never thought of it that way before, but of course, Isabel would want to see it being made!

“Did you bring your verses?”

“I’m afraid that you will think them awful rot!”

"I want to hear them, now."

"I'll never have the courage to read them to you." They had grown suddenly trite, those outbursts scribbled in tubes and crowded 'busses. For such an acute critic of poetry!

"Then I'll read them."

"Not yet. I want you to be seeing everything."

"I know this part of the river. I want to read them now."

It was a new, imperious Isabel. He surrendered his manuscripts. With deep anxiety, he watched her as she read them. He himself flushed as he saw the colour creep up her face, staining the tearose pallor of her cheeks. Pride, was it? It looked like happy pride, the glow in her marvellous eyes.

He bent over her to explain why he had had to sacrifice that line—

"Why, that makes it perfect. Of course, you had to sacrifice it, breaking off like that, it shows the shock, the interruption. I knew you could do it. I knew it!"

"You think I have." He felt humble. If he had, it was her achievement, not his. His work, but her stimulus, her influence.

"I wonder if you know how fresh it is, how new? It is so unconscious, not strained."

"What a darling you are, Isabel!"

"Say that again!"

"What? Darling?"

"But not that way."

"Not on this boat, this kind of a boat!"

"In the other boat, will you, really?"

Enchanting, this new Isabel! But her words confused him. She wanted him to tell her, why, she had known, she had always known! Her glance set his pulses racing.

“I’m not sure what I will say when I have you all to myself.”

She buried herself in his verses. But he knew that she was equally conscious of his nearness, of the brushing of their sleeves, of their uneven breathing, of the boat waiting at Kew.

A woman with a noisy flock of children took the seats next to him, and he was pushed closer to Isabel, close to the slender sweetness of her girlish body. Almost in silence, arms touching, side by side they went on to Hampton Court. Once in a while, tremulously, she would point to a new shade of green in the shrubbery which ran down to the waters’ edge, or to a blur of fruit blossoms on the bank, and each time their eyes met with that sensation of shock: looks that day stripped naked!

At Hampton Court, they essayed sightseeing, but it was a feeble effort, for the river was calling to them. Graeme suggested abridging the sightseeing. Isabel’s step had begun to drag. He did not want her tired before the day began.

He had a little speech ready for her as he would place her in the boat: about this being the real beginning of their day; that in that boat she belonged to him; the world with its customs, other people, all banished, untrue. Nothing existed but themselves, for that hour. But the boatman hung around, repeating his instructions as to the way the boat must

be sent back from Kew—Wade leaped into the boat and shoved off.

He rowed as in a fury of haste. He had forgotten his threat to be vain of his skill. He was in a fever to get her away from people who hang around; from pests of boatmen, and museum guides, and old women in parks; from wives and husbands, from all the policing which makes such a life-giving friendship seem wrong.

He awoke suddenly to the spectacle he was giving her.

“I’m running away with you, Isabel!”

She smiled back at him.

“Aren’t you afraid? For I want to! I want to carry you away from all the things which hold us back there. I want to kiss you, to hold you in my arms, to keep you,—and instead—”

“Instead?”

“I am going to row you soberly to Kew. And eat lunch with you, somewhere, with everybody looking on. And I am going to talk sober plans with you, about work, and money-making. I am going to take you home without even kissing you. But you will have to stop looking at me, Isabel!”

“Yes?” said Isabel, looking at him.

Their eyes clung together; he was forgetting to row.

“Where are you going?” she cried.

For he had made a sharp turn, and was heading for a spit of land which was covered with willows and tangled shrubbery.

“I’m going,” he answered, without looking at her, “to break that promise, part of it, as fast as I can!”

CHAPTER XXI

THE SENSE OF HOME

ALANDING had once stood there, running out from the bank. Nothing was left of it now but one rotting post jutting up from a mesh of matted weeds in the iridescent, stagnant water. Heavy undergrowth concealed the bank's edge. Aspens and willows trailed their branches in the stream.

Graeme speared the weeds with his oar, then pulled himself to shore by the long branches. He laid his oars carefully in the bottom of the boat, tying his rope to the old blackened post.

Looked like a hag's tooth—making similes? Going to let the writing habit trick him at his moment of deepest living? He was to hold for the first, the last time, the woman he loved in his arms, he was to hold her sweetness close, and here he was consciously seeing pictures, making images! How could his senses, tingling towards their tryst, record the details of its setting? Whereas never before had they been so active, so acute. One would think he would remember nothing but Isabel, sitting in the boat!

As he was fastening the boat to the blackened post, he was storing away a vivid picture of the stagnant water, of the swirl where the running stream stopped, caught by the arm of land, by the fingers of growing things; he was conscious of the bright insolence of the opposite, planted side of the river, of the beckoning,

luring loneliness of the tree and shrub-covered point. His ears, too, were noting the wild bird calls, mate calling to mate. His nostrils were discovering an aromatic herb, something he had a name for, when a boy. His senses sharpened, rather than dulled. Queer, how a man's mind works. And Isabel sitting in the boat!

It was a brooding, deserted spot. Nature, it would seem, was encouraging them, encouraging all lovers, urging the tryst—

He hadn't planned this in London. He'd intended to talk things out; to plan. No chance in London. Twelve o'clock always getting to be one o'clock in London! Intended to talk of Paris, of calm, orderly plans. And they would, too. But not until he had held her in his arms, breathed her fragrance, met that challenge of soft daring—

Strange, he thought, how calm he felt. Calm and deliberate. Because youth was past, he could lesson his pulse like this— He stretched out his hand to help Isabel over the treacherous mat of boughs and slimy growth, and found his pulse racing, pounding like a dynamo, under her soft fingers.

His hand tightened over her wrist. He steadied her over the mat of boughs and grass, and was leading her carefully to solid ground, to the bower of greenery and filtering sunlight, when she broke from him, and ran fleetly up the bank.

Frightened her. He wasn't going to frighten her. He was going to hold her just once in his arms. Once. And then London, and duty, the daily rut again. But

richer, endurable the rut would be for the memory of Isabel held once against his breast.

She turned and looked down on him. He lost a heartbeat. Her radiance, her youth startled him. She was holding back the branches which had concealed an old path. Standing there, smiling down on him, the girlish arms outspread to hold the branches back for him, with the sunlight stencilling leaf-patterns on her face and hair, and putting imps of daring into her eyes.

Not frightened. But waiting as does a victor for his cup, or his wreath. Her wistful pathetic girlhood she was dropping as a discarded cloak. A woman was looking at him. She might have been posing for a race-goddess, this radiant, joyous Isabel.

He would never forget that picture of her. She called forth worship and humility. That superb creature loving the poor little clerk of Fetter Lane! Standing among the branches, smiling down on him, he staring up at her, adoring her. Instead of rushing to her, gathering her in his arms, watching her, printing her image thus for ever on his mind, that he might always so possess her, summon her to him. Or was he steadying himself, doubting, he demanded, his own captaincy? What was it warning him that he did not know himself; that his strength had never been tested?

A branch snapped, breaking his tension. He bounded up the bank, and she was in his arms, held, straining, against his heart. Bursting that breast of his, so full of love for her!

Holding her, kissing her, again and again. As

though each kiss held the joy of the first, the poignancy of the last. Joy and forebodings! Greetings and farewells. Holding Isabel against his heart—letting her hear what it was crying to her. He had never known what life meant, what joy or woe meant, until that throbbing moment.

“Talk?” He smothered the poor little word with kisses. Plenty of time by and bye. Time, later, to say all the things that poorer mortals have to speak, to be *heard*. But for that minute, silence and rapture; soul meeting soul at the touch of lonely lips.

Through the tumult of his brain a thought was pushing. The husband of Alma, husband of another woman, he should be feeling guilty, disavowing his loyalty to her. Instead, this stupefying sensation of achievement, of completion. The old scorch of shame of a false relation gone, and in its place, triumph. All the ideals of starvation, asceticism, proved false by this blaze of sanctification?

What was the truth his soul was seeking? He seemed to be reaching higher, towards something better and nobler than Wade Graeme. He, husband and father, with another man’s wife in his arms, finding it the holiest moment of his life. What was wrong, with himself, or with the world and its teachings?

Something Korniloff had said to him came into his mind—

His burst of laughter shocked his own ears. Little wonder it startled Isabel! She pulled herself away from him, questioning him with her tender eyes.

He made his way to a fallen branch, and giddily,

like a man who has been drunk, and suddenly sobered, seated himself, looking at Isabel.

“Lies, Isabel.”

“Lies?”

“The things they tell the mob, the things we follow, cling to and believe!”

Not sure that she understood him yet: watching his face; asking him—

“It was like being alone in a church, before the crowd comes in!”

A flash of joy ran over her face. He meant that! She came to him, and knelt at his feet.

“I know. I was reading something like that, the other day. ‘It is the sense of home in another soul that gives to love its chastity.’ Home, here, Wade. Back there, it’s wrong for both of us, for all of us, and knowing it, why it poisons everything. Trying to *pretend* it’s right, and it can’t be made right, where love isn’t. Just shame, and pretending—”

He took her face in his hands, and turned it up to his, letting the sun shine upon the truth of the sober, steady eyes.

“The sense of home!”

CHAPTER XXII

ON THE RIVER

A LONG time it takes, going by rowboat from Hampton Court to Kew, if a girl is in the boat, a girl with lilacs on her hat! When Graeme had pushed away from the point where the landing had once been, he found that it was too late to carry out his program. They decided to take the boat back to the boathouse at Hampton Court, where they reconciled the boatman to the change of plan by a generous gratuity. And they took a train for Kew.

They were so late for the luncheon hour that they called it high tea. Disregarding the opinion of the waiter that they were forcing the season, they ordered their tea served on the porch. He brought them some toasted buns, and some fussy cakes, and later, little chocolate-covered wafers. Business was dull so early in the season, so he hovered about them like a restless hen, insuring a respectable gratuity.

Graeme demanded marmalade. Did Isabel like marmalade? Or would she prefer strawberries, Bar le duc? Isabel adored strawberries, Bar le duc.

Like healthy young animals to whom romance is yet a definition, they devoured everything brought to them. The waiter eyed them curiously; he had already changed his mind several times about them.

"I wonder if he will consent to tear himself away

from you after he clears the things away?" speculated Graeme, his eyes resting on the lips he had kissed, the brow, the soft tearose throat that had not been denied him. His Isabel! How rich he felt! Strong enough now for any struggle, because of her love for him, her faith in him. He wanted to get rid of the staring fellow that he might tell her again of the strength she was giving him.

"If he can be snubbed, I'd like to sit here awhile, wouldn't you? Aren't you tired?"

"A little," she confessed. They had walked more than they realized, at Hampton Court, and then from the Kew station, and around the gardens. And, moreover, the waiter had told her that there was music at four in the hall, for the tea drinkers. It must be nearly that now. She would love to listen to the music, with him!

"We will," said Graeme, thinking that he was listening to music then. No matter what law or custom said, those sweet lips were his. Hadn't she told him so? Told him with her eyes, as well as with the words she spoke aloud; told him with her mind, the way it spoke to his. Told him, too, that she was afraid, of her life, the weeks ahead of her, afraid of her husband.

Her terrors chilled him. To a certain martyrdom he was condemning her. Yet what else could he do? Was there anything to do but patiently to follow his plan? He did not have enough to take her away now, start her securely in Paris. Not enough to take them both there, to install her safely, and to bring him back. Galling fact, poverty!

Trying to reassure himself, he told her that it would

not be long before he could send her there, if they decided she would go alone. But he hated to think of her going to a strange place alone, getting started alone. Since she wanted to work, they did not need so much money, and it was right, her wanting to work, although it had not occurred to him. She should be independent; every woman ought to be financially independent. Those fellows, the ones he'd met through Hobbs, Korniloff and the rest, are right about that. Any bargain based on love is sordid and vulgar.

He wondered why her cheeks flamed, why her eyes did not meet his.

"Korniloff puts it so clearly. As long as love is made a commercial transaction, people will pretend love who do not feel it; people will stay together who would not otherwise. And if one is a hypocrite about anything, he will be untrue about others. Do you think a man, or woman, who would lie about love, would not lie in business, about anything? We are just beginning to realize that honesty is all of one piece, we're beginning to understand something about character, about mind-habits."

He waited for her to answer him. When she did not speak, he asked, uneasily: "Can you be patient for awhile? Can—can you bear it, Isabel?"

Still silence. It filled him with forebodings. She always spoke with reserve of her husband. She did not like to talk of her life. It made him flinch to think of letting her go back to it—to her husband. His shamed uneasiness grew as he watched her face. Not to be able to help her, having to stand, and watch her pass by, with that look, of dread, in her eyes! If

he had made anything out of his life, weren't the failure he was, he could help her to get away, help her until she was independent; he suspected that she never had enough to carry her farther than Regent Street without making a special request, and explanation. Just like himself, for that matter!

But being a man, it was worse; unmanly and shameful, not having anything of your own to help a fellow-creature who is in distress. Even if you didn't love her, you would want to help her. But because you love her, it isn't right to help her. Right, on the other hand, to send her back to the man she shrinks from, is afraid of—wasn't she afraid that first night? Not even his shamed cowardice, at home, had ever filled him with the impotent humiliation which was scorching him that instant! Sitting there, watching her brave misery, and bye and bye saying: "Thank you for loving me, and now it is time to go back to—him!"

"He isn't cruel to you, Isabel?"

"Cruel?" she seemed to be balancing the word. "No, not cruel."

He wasn't satisfied. But he couldn't go on. The waiter was bearing down on them with freshly baked cakes; substantial ones, as though he realized that this meal was also their lunch, and wanted them to understand his sympathy.

Impatiently, Graeme asked: "We don't want anything more, do we?"

She shook her head.

"Clear these things away in a hurry." His tone carried the suggestion: "And yourself, too."

The tone and the fee made the waiter change his mind again about them. He cleared the things and himself away in a hurry.

Graeme was returning to his questions, but she stopped him.

"All the other things we wanted to talk about, waiting. All the great day wasted!"

"No, not wasted. Not that time of revelation of what life might mean to people who love and understand one another. Understanding is the thing out of which the great love grows. Lesser loves may grow understanding, even a great understanding, but it's apt to be one-sided."

He would never forget that hour in the shrubbery—loving her, adoring her, but guarding her; not willing to make life more miserable for his Isabel. That's what love means—ought to, making life easier, not harder, for the one one loves.

But he was troubled to the depths of his soul. Thankful, before that morning, for her friendship, and her love, for knowing her, even, and for the chance of their meagre meetings. Wonderful privilege, it seemed, back in the drabness of London, to have her life touch even so distantly his own. But now, it was different; since he had held her in his arms, had strained her to him, had felt her answering kisses on his lips, it was all changed. And it was going to be different. Because life inexorably pushes forward. He wanted to be kissing her now; he would want to be kissing her tomorrow: he would want to be kissing her until both were safely dead.

"Yes!" she answered him, smiling. Something told

him it was an effort, that she was trying to cheer him. "I know. But say it aloud!"

'Tell her that that other emotion, back in London, had been only the forerunner, the threat of love? That this was love at midstream, no mistaking what this was, the current which had so nearly carried him out to sea?

So many new charms this day had the new Isabel! Gestures of joy, of grace. He had watched the play of thought over her eyes as she read; watched her handle the things the waiter brought her, making eating into an art; watched her as she charmed the waiter, himself; watched her as she drew her gloves on, the gloves he was going to take off as soon as they were alone once more, in the gardens waiting below!

"At least," he said, "we have had one day together, for memories."

Her voice was so low he could scarcely hear her. "Not—for beginnings?"

He wished she would look at him. Sometime, they would have another day like this, and he would find a place where they wouldn't feel like a nursemaid and her policeman—surely, there were places in London where they could meet—decently.

"There isn't a place in London," said Isabel, solemnly, "there isn't a place in the world where we won't feel like a nursemaid and her policeman, where we won't feel dishonest, and cheap."

He waited for her to raise her troubled eyes to his.

"It's a question, not of where we shall meet, but of how we shall let ourselves feel about meeting."

Even yet he was not sure of her meaning. Until she lifted her eyes to his—

“Oh, I can’t go back to him, Wade!”

Only half a man! Seeing that look in her eyes, and not being able to comfort her! Not being able to protect her—her eyes telling him her dread—

“I’ll work hard, fast,” he said miserably. “I’ll make enough money as fast as I can!”

“Have I got to go back to him tonight? Oh, Wade!”

He could not answer her.

“I’ll be poor; I will work, do anything, anywhere, if I don’t have to go back to him tonight!”

All drooping now, his Isabel, like a flower, uprooted, in the sun.

“What else—can we do?” Shackled, as he shamefully was!

“I can’t go back to him, Wade. I ought not to go back to him, and I know why. I have been reading, some of the books on that list you gave me; and even before. It isn’t just my own instinct; or my own selfishness, calling it my instinct. Other people know, too, that it’s wrong. You knew, too, back there, on the river, where the wrong is; that it’s wrong staying together where there is no love. I know why I hate my life. I should hate my life. I hate myself for having made it what it is.”

“Is there no—comfort,” he began miserably, “no comfort in knowing that we are doing right, according to what is expected of us—Our instinct of right, of wrong, runs away ahead of the crowd, of the customs it made.” Wasn’t that all he could do, try to lessen

her sense of shame? Didn't he know what it was, that feeling?

"I think all wives have had the same feeling, always, all wives," she added, "who have sold themselves."

"Isabel! I can't have you look like that!"

"Like—Lucrece?"

It was a blow between the eyes. His hand went out, as though to fend off the next thrust.

Seeing the effect of her words on him, she cried out: "Oh, I'm sorry, Wade! But it's true. I loathe my life, because that's the truth about it. I'm not blaming any one but myself. I saw what he was, and married him. An alternative. May I tell you about it, why I married him?"

He tried to make his eyes lie to her; to keep her from knowing how she had hurt him. As though he could ever deceive Isabel! He said he wanted her to tell him. He had often wondered. His voice did not sound to him as his own.

"If you could see Annersley. If I could make you see Annersley, our Shropshire Annersley! I think you would know why. Mother and I used to laugh at it, in the beginning. It hadn't awed us then, as it had itself, by its own beliefs, customs, by the custom of marriage, most of all. One was married, or unmarried, a woman, lucky or cursed, in Annersley."

She was staring at her hands lying clasped on her lap.

"Mother had intended that I should learn a trade, or some profession. It seemed all right to Mother, a Frenchwoman, the plan that I should some day take

care of myself. Before we went to Annersley. After Father's death, we went there, where his people were. Mother could earn money there, they wrote—until I was ready, until I had finished school. But before that, her illness began. I had to stop school—it used to worry her, my having to take care of her, instead of getting ready to meet the world, as she called it. I used to see the fear in her eyes when she looked at me. I wasn't afraid then, for the girls I knew in Annersley were not getting ready to be independent; they expected, the pretty ones, to get married. The others, the unlucky ones, helped the lucky ones in their homes, or took boarders, if they had a home—oh, there were so many pitiful boarding houses, old-maid boarding houses in Annersley! Marriage, or failure, that was what life was for a girl in Annersley. There were not enough boys and men to go round. So many dreadful old maids there, girls who had waited, hoping! It affected me, in one way; mother in another. It frightened us. Did you ever see a place like Annersley?"

"I fancy it's typical. That's our system. It works out all right for the ones inside, sometime," said Wade, correcting himself. "But it crushes the ones who don't get in, who get under!" he added.

"There wasn't any time to learn anything. Each month, there was more to do for Mother, and the money we had was getting scarcer, the doctor's bills, the medicines! I used to pretend that I couldn't find any one to help me with the cleaning; it would have frightened her to know how low our fund was growing. Wade! I want you to know that it wasn't *work*

I was afraid of! It wasn't that! I used even to scrub the floors. Afterwards, my aunt took me to her house. She meant to be kind; she was as kind as she knew how to be; but she had daughters, too, and she was frightened, the Annersley way. It was only a temporary refuge, I understood that. I was to be looking for something to do, before the money gave out. There wasn't much left. Not enough to start a boarding house!

"The girls talked of marriage, of having a home of their own. They would have married *him* in a minute——"

"You mean—Blood?" He could not bring himself to say: Your husband.

"Oh, you won't like me when I finish telling you this! See how I am trying to save myself! Pitiful little devices! Telling you it wasn't work I was afraid of, and that other nice girls were willing to marry him!"

Not *like* her! Was there anything she could do or say which could keep him from loving her? As she talked, he was picturing the girl at Annersley; and loving her. With his whole soul loving her!

"Strange!" said Isabel. "The world judges us by the choice we make, condemns us if we make a mistake, but if *we* discover the mistake, we're sinners!"

He could see that she did not like to tell her story. Wouldn't it wait for some other time?

She had to get finished with it now!

"He was travelling then; for some firm, a hardware firm. He used to come to see us, Mother and me. He seemed so old; I used to think he came to

see her; I never thought of him that way, not as *my* friend," she stumbled, and hesitated.

"There was a long time when I did not see him. I was with my aunt. I had learned to know Annersley better, to be afraid of it, of life. Those poor girls of Annersley, Wade! They only wanted to live, to have the chance to live. The ones they used to talk about there, they did not *plan* to do wrong, I am sure they didn't. One girl—this happened before Mother died—went to London to work; to be a nurse. She never came back. After awhile, people stopped talking about her. Her family never spoke of her. It wasn't right to speak about her! Some one saw her here in London, and told Mother about her, when I was in the next room. I often wonder if I will meet her on the streets. I want to meet her. I am no better than she is—I mean I was worse than she was—for she loved some one, maybe, really loved him. I was—only more businesslike."

It was spoiling their day, this story. He wished she did not want to tell it. But it was on her mind; she had to share it with some one, the poor, lonely Isabel!

"The other one, another girl I knew, went to London, and came back; with a baby. It was terrible, for me, her coming back just then. My aunt had been wanting me to live with a friend of hers, like a member of the family who does all the work. I wanted an honest job—I had been telling my aunt I was coming to London, when that girl came back with her baby! They had been asking: What sort of work was I going to do? And why I had to come to

London? And then, that girl with her baby. Once when the talk got so bad, I went to see that other girl, and she told me about it; how hard it was for a girl all alone to be straight, how people don't believe you want to be straight. It seemed easier to stay in Annersley, and to grow bitter and old."

"You poor child!" The orchestra had started to blare. Graeme was straining not to lose any of Isabel's low, halting words.

"Just then, about then, he came back, Mr. Blood. The Annersley girls were crazy about him. They were crazy about any man. All the boys worth looking at left Annersley, sleepy Annersley, their first chance. I overheard my aunt telling my cousin Anne, one night, to get him away from me. Not quite so crudely! And it came to me then that I was disregarding the only chance I had of getting away from Annersley. I didn't want to be one of those starved old maids, caught, trapped by life, piecing out other people's lives; looking after other people's babies when all they wanted was one of their own!"

When all they wanted was one of their own!

"That was a terrible night. I never slept. I was afraid he might go without seeing me, and never come back. I was afraid he might discover that he liked Anne, who didn't shiver away from him when he touched her hand! I made myself face the picture, myself taking care of Anne's babies, and I thought of the girl who never came back, so the next day when he came to see me, and asked if he might take a bride back with him to London, I shut my eyes, Wade, and said he might. I wasn't so frightened, then; I

was relieved; and he was kind to me. After that dreadful night of fear, anything else seemed safe. And people didn't think it wrong in Annersley to marry some one you didn't love. I didn't know I was doing wrong—"

"You weren't, dear."

"Yes, I was, but I didn't know it, in words. No one had ever told me about loving being the only thing that makes it right. I felt it was wrong, but I deadened my feelings. There was so much excitement, and I began to feel important. He was kind to me, then, and patient. And afterwards, too. After awhile, he didn't stay home much. He used to like other women. I know. He left letters around. I grew not to mind. It left me alone, and I was glad to be alone."

They sat, staring away from the other, while the orchestra whirled out a waltz tune. Life, for some, a waltz, for the few a waltz, with Annersley and Bird Place marching wretchedly along!

"You see, I had to tell you. I did it with my eyes wide open."

Both of them had done it with their eyes wide open, she at Annersley, he at the Cape. If one could call it having their eyes open! They were being punished now for their ignorance; for not having acquired enough knowledge about that terrible indissoluble relation.

The orchestra slipped into a tune all London was humming. The eyes of the man and girl met; in one long, drowning gaze they met, until hers fell.

The air sobbed its way out. When it was done,

Isabel cried: "When we come to the end of a perfect day, then what? Oh, Wade, let's get away from here!"

He led her down into the garden. He could feel her trembling, sobbing. He found a sheltered place, and again he had her in his arms, against his breast, comforting her.

She whispered: "Wade, is this what God meant?"

"It isn't God's plan! It's what we've made it. You said it, darling. You said you did wrong in marrying him. That's where the wrong is."

"Does it make it right, the going on with it, going on doing wrong?"

"Shouldn't a promise mean anything?" He was repeating the arguments he had been having with himself, trying to see if they held. "All our human relationships rest on that, the belief that a promise means something. Suppose we could disregard at any minute an arrangement, a contract, and say: 'It was a mistake,' or 'I'm tired of it,' where would society be?"

"Society ought not to make people promise to love forever—" she paused, crimsoning.

True, indeed. The old laws matched the old ethics; there were no laws for the emerging morality. But hadn't they *promised* to love when they knew it was impossible?— He broke off, bending to kiss her eyelids. "I'm not preaching to you, Isabel! I'm in it, *with* you! Our customs are like a game; we have to follow the rules, play it square. That's as far as I've reached, that we have to play it square."

"Then if that's right, it's always going to be the same?" She tried to pull herself away from him.

"People will go on playing the game fair, and knowing it's wrong? And most of them cheating, rather than tell the truth about it, tell the reason the rules are not fair?"

Straight to the bull's-eye, that question! Unanswerable, too!

"If it's true, right, what you say, then we'd have no progress!" cried Isabel.

"There are two ways out of it," Graeme frowned. "Martyrdom, a lot of martyrdom." He would hate to lead his Isabel to that! "A lot of the people who would scorn you, make your life miserable, would not be half as good, as honest, as you. People who pretend to live respectable lives, pretend to be satisfied with our social system. And the other way—cheating, secret orchards—"

"And you—wouldn't—love one who was willing to be a martyr?"

He had to look away from her, from her tear-washed eyes before he could answer her.

"I'm not going to let you be a starving outcast, Isabel!"

"There's no honourable way out of it?" she whispered against his breast.

Did she know, he asked himself, how he loved her? Did she guess that he was yearning that minute to gather her up into his life, carry her away from her fears, daring poverty and dishonour? Forgetting, renouncing his family, forgetting tomorrow, forgetting everything but Isabel?

"The only honourable way," he answered, conscious that his words were sounding wooden and sanctimo-

nious, "is to live together openly—saying, tacitly: 'The laws of England are bad. We cannot live up to them, and we refuse to lie about it.' If people knew us, enough people, then we might think we were helping things along, encouraging progress, as you said. But we're not. And we haven't the money to do it, if we felt we should. I have—duties. Divorce is out of the question, you know that, my dear? Alma has never done anything to make that possible, nor will she ever. You might get one—you say you have had cause—but have you proofs? And what good would your freedom do us, were I bound,—darling!" For he felt her droop in his arms. He wondered if she were keeping anything from him. If there were only some way which would spare her!

"We must go—back—now," she said.

She let him kiss her, eyes, brows and lips, but it was an acquiescence; it had the flavour of a farewell. As moonlight to sunlight this surrender to that glad morning response!

He was buying tickets for Chelsea when she remembered the old woman.

"Not Chelsea. Battersea Park, Wade."

He tried to persuade her that Chelsea would be better for both of them.

"It must be Battersea Park! I'll tell you why on the boat!"

On the boat, she told him. She had meant to tell him, she explained, the first thing. How their day had flown!

Could the old woman, she asked him, have known where she lived? But she felt sure she had not been

followed. Or where he—her husband, worked? Suppose she had gone to him with her story, wouldn't he be waiting for her to get off at Chelsea?

"Did I say—Chelsea?" He was frowning over the effort to remember just what it was he had said.

"I think, Wade, oh, I am sure that you said *Chelsea*. Would you mind very much sitting inside? We could see, and not be seen."

The ride home was a failure. Isabel forced a wintry gaiety, but it did not last. She fell into a pensive silence. He talked to her of Paris, and she tried to answer his plans. But he could see that she was resisting the return, that she was thinking only of her homecoming.

They were nearing Chelsea, when she leaned close to whisper: "The end of a perfect day, Wade!"

"Wonderful it was for me, darling. Don't look so tragic! Just one smile for me to remember! Why, is this Chelsea? What is it you wanted me to do?"

"If he should be there, watching, and doesn't get on, we will go on to Battersea Park," she reminded him. "If he should come aboard, could you slip past him, leave me here? He would never remember you, if he did not see us together."

He left her side at once, for the boat was pulling towards the slip. No terrors had the old woman for him. It was simply a threat, a cheap threat. One she would have no way of following up. Not unless she knew Isabel by sight, had followed her there—His darling was full of tremors. His gift to her, those terrors!

He pulled his hat low over his eyes, and got into the thick of the crowd, striving not to lose sight of Isabel. He could see her, scanning the faces of the crowd on the pier. Her eyes were darting like a swallow's wings. He saw a look of relief fall on her face, to be followed by a flash of fear, of recognition. He followed her gaze and saw Blood making for the gangplank. Once again he looked at Isabel. She was standing, as though frozen, waiting—

Nothing for him to do but to get off. He mustn't be found on that boat.

He passed Blood on the lower deck. Blood did not recognize him. He was making hurriedly for the stairs.

Abominable to have to leave Isabel to that man's anger! Like the embrace of the Iron Virgin, his task.

He looked around the dock for the old woman with the untrimmed hat. She was nowhere in sight.

Dully—he made his way towards his own home. Going home, he told himself, because he could see her light. He could creep out of his house once in a while to see if her light were burning, if they had come home. His mind was in a torment. He wished he had run away with her. But where would they run? How far could they get on the money he had? And Blood would find her. She said he was that kind.

“ ‘Is this what God meant?’ ”

He let himself into his cheerless house. Alma was setting the table.

She had not expected him quite so soon. He had told her a later hour in order to cover possible contingencies.

Someway, he got through with the sordid meal. Somehow, he managed the chronicling of the next lie, that he had to get back to the office. And then the cool air on his face, and the pavements of Bird Place and Haberdasher Street. Until midnight, the pavements of Bird Place and Haberdasher Street, and the sharp spring winds on his face.

There was a light in the upper room of Isabel's house.

For hours that light kept burning. It sent a pale, wordless message to him.

At least, she was there; near him. If she cried out, he could hear her. What consolation in that? She would not cry out. If she did, nothing would keep him from her, not God himself.

At midnight, the light went out, and Graeme crept back to his house, and to his second-hand bed.

The mocking, torturing air was still haunting him. It followed him to bed, and kept him awake into the morning hours: "The End of a Perfect Day!"

CHAPTER XXIII

JEPSON'S DINNER

DURING the miserable week which followed the river trip, a letter came to Graeme from Jepson, inviting him to dine at his apartments on Monday evening. Fackenthal, he added, was to be there, and an old friend, Hornbrook, of Oxford; sociology; just returning from Munich.

Gratifying to be included in an intimate affair like that. Asked, of course, as a friend of Fackenthal's, but gratifying just the same. A high-brow evening. Hornbrook of Oxford; he'd seen his books in the libraries.

How could he talk of new books and theories of life with his mind left behind, prowling around Isabel's windows? He would be an owl and a bore. He decided that he did not want to go, and it was several hours before he remembered that Jepson was the door to opportunity and freedom. He sent a letter which said that he was delighted to accept.

But he couldn't put by the nagging thought that he might be doing something to help her. Go bluntly to her house, and take her away with him? Blood would be cruel to her now all right; something told him he was being cruel. It was unbearable, the thought of Isabel unhappy, helpless.

The duty of a man with a wife and child of his own

to save another woman from her husband? Put into words, it sounded fishy. If she were starving, wouldn't it be right to give her bread? Wrong, on the other hand, not to? If she were freezing, shouldn't one toss her a coat or a blanket? Well, wasn't she starving? Wasn't she freezing?

It's loving her,—then, that makes the difference? If one did not love her, one might allow one's self to interfere. "Not right to come between husband and wife"; even if hatred has already come between them? Haven't advanced far enough yet, we haven't, we don't recognize hate yet as cause for separation, don't see that hate turns the relationship into slavery.

One can protect a woman from a brute on the street—if she isn't married to him. Marriage makes it impertinent to be humane.

Very sternly must it be reasoned out, in order to understand the deep meaning, or reason, of our civilized customs! Very sternly indeed! No wonder Korniloff's kind puts marriage in the list of needed reforms, with child-labour, suffrage and the rest! The last one to come, they say. For happy people won't admit it's slavery. Because it isn't slavery, if both are happy. Love doesn't only make it respectable, love alone makes it humane!

Swinging off the 'bus one evening at Haberdasher Street, arguing it out with himself, his glance isolated a shabby old woman who was climbing into the 'bus opposite. He placed her instantly. The eavesdropper of Hyde Park, the prowler, without question, that woman, and going away from Bird Place? What was she doing there? He forgot to move on. He

stood watching her, staring from the curbing after the 'bus which was lumbering down the street.

It wasn't possible that Blood—no, even a man of his stripe wouldn't stoop to such a thing as that! Set a woman like that to watch Isabel, to spy and tell on her? His blood ran hot with anger, and then chilled with wretched helplessness.

How was he going to find out about it? At the office during the hours that Blood was away. Her leaving at that hour suggested the truth of his suspicion. How was he going to know that it was true? And then, what?

Read, study, with the thought of Isabel being mewed up, and spied upon? He couldn't read; the words mocked his eyes. Walking made the night endurable, walking round and round the square, peering under his hatbrim at her reticent windows.

The day before the Jepson dinner, a note found its way to him, in her handwriting. It was handed to him in the outer office, by Gryce. He got away to the rest room, all the blood in his body, he thought, in his face.

It read like a telegram, the message of one in a hurry: "Be more careful, I'm being watched. Don't worry."

Don't worry! Angel heart of her!

Like dikes giving way, the breaking of the tension; his relief was like reservoirs overflowing.

She was getting out again, not alone, evidently; had managed to edge close enough to a box to drop the letter in; or had had an unguarded moment with a tradesman. The envelope could tell him nothing, not

even that it was a complete victory, its getting to him! But it wasn't so hopeless, for she herself wasn't hopeless. Or she wouldn't have warned him. Perhaps she thought if they were both careful and patient the guarding might soon end?

She had seen him passing the house, watching her windows; she knew, then, how anxious he was, she had not felt deserted. The courage, that message of hers put into him!

He was able to read that night; for the first time since Kew did not prowl around her house like a hungry pigeon. And the next day, Sunday, at the office, he managed to turn out the first paragraphs which were not given to the wastebasket. He even managed to get up some anticipation for the dinner at Mr. Jepson's.

Fackenthal was in the hall, being helped out of his overcoat when he entered. They went in together.

Hard to believe that these scientific tomes he'd unearthed in the Public Library had been written by the simple person to whom Jepson was presenting them. He had the sunken eyes of the student, and that was all. His manner was that of a truant schoolboy.

They stood for some time around the fine fireplace, until Graeme began to wonder what it was they were waiting for? Machinery never goes wrong in establishments like this, he was thinking, when he overheard Jepson saying to Fackenthal that he was expecting another guest, a friend "who had just blown in from New York."

Hornbrook had just made the discovery that Graeme knew some of the socialist leaders. "Know

them personally? That's interesting. I knew the Munich fellows. Met a few of 'em in Berlin."

The American was ushered in, and Wade discovered that they had all been drooling. Couldn't be prosy and leisurely with that dynamo in the room, that was what he was, a dynamo! Droll, the lazy way he moved, the leisurely manner of rolling a cigarette! Everything was slow about him, except his eyes, they were electric; they betrayed the inner man.

Superb type, Street, the American. Made one think of the crouching strength of a panther! Not in a hurry to speak, but hearing everything; ready to pounce on the thing he wants—

Cocktails being carried in, American cocktails, in honour of the American. Going to have steins on the table for Hornbrook? The talk turning to Mannhattans and Martinis. Shows what a mole one has been not to know a Manhattan from a Martini!

At the table, they had discussed Germany, her military system, her social evils, her war preparations, and the meal was well along before Hornbrook recalled his desire to know more about the London socialist. He had already made the statement that socialism was the only thing which might prevent a general war in Europe, and he wasn't sure about that. Later, he wanted to ask about New York. But first, London.

"Yes, I go to their meetings," admitted Graeme. He had just been thinking of Korniloff and his crowd. Why was it when his views coincided with those fellows, his opinions matching theirs at almost every point, why was it then that he should feel so much

more at home with Jepson and his friends? As though he were sojourning, was his feeling at Korniloff's, at Laflin's.

"Yes, I go to their meetings. I go rather regularly to a place in Leadenhall, almost every Monday evening, in fact, to get a talk or two. Some pretty fair talkers among them."

Street it was who discovered that it was Monday. He declared himself to be one variety of socialist. No one but Street would have thought of suggesting that they hasten their meal in order to "take in" the Leadenhall meeting.

Hornbrook abetted him. Fackenthal, too, said that he was interested. Jepson made it a condition that they would return to his rooms for coffee and cigars.

Graeme followed them from the dining-room with regret. He was wishing that he had not mentioned the Leadenhall gathering. He liked the rambling talk of these travelled, informed men. Especially liked Street. He wanted to hear what Hornbrook had begun to tell them before he recalled his interest in socialism; the perfection of the war-machinery, the hordes of grey uniformed men. Hornbrook said he had seen them drilling out of Berlin; masses of them; seas of them. "They could overflow Europe."

Also, he liked the luxury of the rich-hued dining-room. He resented being hurried on somewhere else. He could go to Leadenhall any time. Always being hurried on somewhere. The age of hurry. Get settled anywhere, and some one discovers that you are comfortable, having a good time, and some one else

discovers a taxi is waiting, or a friend's machine to take you somewhere else where you won't be so comfortable! Jepson's plaint!

"Our system?" He could hear Street preparing to answer Hornbrook.

"We'll have to be getting on," announced Jepson, leading the way to the hall, "if you want to go to that meeting."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HOLY ESTATE

AN undersized Jew with a hint of Cockney in his over-fluent speech was holding the platform when the Jepson party entered. The group had to separate, Fackenthal and Graeme taking seats behind their host and his other guests.

The little man on the platform was making a bitter indictment of the marriage system. Graeme supposed it to be a section of his topic, part of the general social rebellion, but as the talk progressed, he grew restless. He had nodded as he took his seat, to Korniloff and Marie in the seats behind them. He leaned over the back of his seat to ask:

"How long has he been holding forth?"

"Just begun. About three minutes before you came in. He's long-winded. But stay through it. A fine speaker's coming after him; from Moscow."

"Is this his subject, marriage?"

Korniloff nodded, his black eyes beaming at the visitors Graeme had brought. He was in tune with the speaker, Wade knew.

He was for leaving at once. They had not come for this. He spoke to Jepson, bending forward. "Perhaps they could find another place? He had a friend who would direct them."

"But this isn't bad stuff!" returned Jepson.

"They're interested." He nodded his head towards his friends. "They don't care what the subject is, as long as it's insurgent. Look at Street!"

The American was vividly listening, nodding his approval, through a veil of cigarette smoke, of the hurtling points of the speaker.

"Wait awhile," suggested Jepson. "They're not bored. I like the little fellow myself."

The speaker was hurling relentless facts and figures. Is a system a success, he was demanding, if its success depends on the systematic sacrifice of those who cannot force their way in? Did they want to know how many thousand girls find their way weekly into the nightlife of London? He'd tell them! Want to know how long they live afterwards? Well, he'd tell them. Want to know who keeps 'em? The unmarried men? No, the men of families, men over forty. The sanctity of the home preserved by the wealthy holocaust! Women of the home being protected, their morality being specialized— "We've got to protect motherhood, instead of wifehood."

"You've got to face these things. Got to know what it all means, and how hypocritical it is when the cities get an attack of virtue and go to housecleaning. What do they do? Send the girls somewhere else. And they come back when the attack of virtue is over."

"You can't fight it that way. London tried it awhile back. Diminished those ghastly figures any? Every year getting bigger. We've got to find a different way. Got to make marriage less selfish, less exclusive, more honest. Got to legalize all children.

Some humane nations are already doing that. That's a housecleaning that would mean something."

Graeme was watching the faces of his old and new friends. He felt the responsibility of the expedition. None of them responded to his anxiety, so he leaned back again in his seat.

"What effect would this have on marriage?" the Jew was demanding. "If all children were equal, all had equal property rights, wouldn't the hypocrisy die down which protects 'my child,' or 'my children'? We say marriage isn't a financial arrangement, but see us run clamouring into court the instant a father or mother leaves over a shilling to anyone outside the family! It will never be honest when it's on that foundation. It's got to rest on integrity."

He began to wander. He spoke of Germany, where marriage was made impossible to hordes of underpaid soldiers. "And the nameless children—why they made better soldiers, anyway, says the Kaiser. Make better soldiers! When do we begin to talk about making better men?"

Graeme could see Hornbrook deliberately forcing the applause, and keeping it going. Trying to make the audience as well as the speaker see that it was the climax, in the opinion of the professed eugenicist, of the little Jew's talk!

The speaker had to stop to accept his ovation. It surprised him. He had not planned this to be his apex. He had been letting himself be carried along by his own invective. Graeme knew his type by this time. Clever; would grab now at his opportunity;

make that his topic—the making of better men. And there he was it, already, enlarging his theme, talking to Hornbrook and his kind who were swift with their applause. But suddenly he launched out into a tirade against the British divorce laws. This was to have been his subject. He wanted divorce to be free. The poor man, and the decent man couldn't afford divorce, only the rich and reckless.

“I think we've had the cream of this,” suggested Jepson, turning in his seat to address Graeme. Hornbrook had just yawned.

Graeme jumped up eagerly. He rejoiced, as he followed Jepson and Fackenthal out of the smoke-darkened room, that the evening was not over, that they were returning to those soul-resting rooms of the editor's.

He was going to hear more good talk. Makes time pass too swiftly for worry, hearing talk of that quality. Can't wear one's mind out in fruitless rebellions when men like these are debating. Have to keep one's brain trimmed, have to put Isabel farther back, as it were in a back seat, telling her to wait patiently—no, vividly, always eagerly waiting, his Isabel!

Liqueurs and coffee and cigars, and a great fire of logs roaring on the hearth! Makes one forget the fog outside, and the outcasts stranded in the fog. Keeps one from being a true socialist, a room, a fireplace like this. Fireplace of the Italian renaissance. Isabel could tell him about the furniture; he fancied it was Jacobean—

Street was standing in front of the fire, his long legs apart, his Indian eyes roving from face to face, his lithe, long, stained fingers rolling a cigarette.

Always rolling cigarettes, Street! And brown paper. A fad, he wondered? Liberals, Street's revolutionary kind, are usually poor. He couldn't tell anything by his careless picturesque dress, serge street clothes, morning clothes, soft shirt and a flowing tie. One would take him for an artist, in London.

It startled him to have Street's stare rest on him, to be singled out by the American.

"*You* wanted to cut and run, the first shot!" he was being accused. "Just because it was unpleasant. Of course, it's unpleasant to listen to it. Vastly more unpleasant to be caught by it. And what's the reason you and I are not caught, that we happen to have felicitous lives? chance, pure chance."

His mind darting irresistibly back to Isabel, at Kew. "Just more businesslike. *I* made a better bargain." Then the American's hazard caught him; felicitous life! He avoided carefully Fackenthal's eye.

"That's the reason you're at a standstill in this big, little island of yours. It's the reason we don't go faster in my country, though we're not at a standstill. We're developing new folkways, acquiring new courages, we're working towards uniform laws, and higher ideals, though all of us don't know it!" he grinned, showing a row of even, nicotined teeth. "Nobody wants to hear or talk about it. As some one said here this evening, I think it was Mr. Fackenthal, nobody can tell the truth about it. If there's a God listening,

he must have a sense of humour the way we treat law, especially this law—the way our lips and ears only respect it! Burrowing, all of us like ostriches, hiding our ears and our eyes in the sand, painfully horrified if we hear any one saying our bird morality isn't honest!"

He pulled out his little book of brown papers and his cotton sack of tobacco and began rolling another cigarette although only half finished the one he was smoking. It was a habit, not a pleasure, smoking, with Street, one could see, thought Graeme; he wasn't conscious enough of his motions to make it a pleasure. Interesting to see how he could hold his cigarette in the corner of his mouth, getting out clearly pronounced words by a rolling habit of the lips! Wager he didn't know he was doing that, either!

"When a family scandal leaks out, that proves what I'm saying, what the little Jew said. What do all the friends do? 'Nobody home!' Think they want to be subpœned? Thank *you*! Testify against a fellow ostrich? Sure enough about their husband ostrich, or their brother ostrich, or even so, what about that skeleton of their youthful home! Every little ostrich frantically conscious that there may be a glass house hit! What judge or jury can be impartial? If a man's life has been soured by following what he considers unjust laws or customs, he's going to be strict with the one who's trying to evade them—If he has defied custom, he's going to be afraid to be lenient. It's typical of the entire public's attitude towards the situation."

"Well," drawled Hornbrook, establishing himself more obscurely in his deep, cushioned chair, "you've stated your case; what's your sentence?"

Street rolled his mobile lips. "It happens I can speak candidly on the subject. I've lived candidly. I'm willing to tell you what I think's the matter with this incestuous marriage of ours. You asked for a sentence: I won't condemn, I'll prescribe. Train deliberately for marriage, as for the highest relation this side of heaven; make it a calamity, or disgrace, to fail in it. Aren't we judged by the friends we keep? Why not the life companion we choose? That's the first. The second; and last: make divorce free upon application of one person—unhappiness is enough reason—anything less is barbarous, connotes slavery."

Graeme had been following with a confused mind. He wondered if he had registered correctly? *Incestuous*? That word was out of place—Street's accuracy had surely failed him. He discovered that the eyes of the rest were challenging the American's vocabulary.

"Before we agree, or disagree, elaborate," suggested Fackenthal in the pleasant way that was his.

Jepson had focussed his monocle on his guest. "First tell me why you call it incestuous. That sounded strange to me."

Grateful to his host for asking that question! That's the beauty of thorough training, courage. One's never afraid to ask questions, never afraid of disclosing untidy corners of ignorance—

"Because it *is* incestuous. We've been giving the word its acquired meaning, of relationship, of con-

sanguinity, and its significance to us, and its helpfulness has been lost. In the tribes, an attraction was observed between people who did not grow up in the same group of tents, or under the same roof. Aversion, or indifference between those who did. Meaning was read into all these simple instincts and a taboo was put finally on marriages of those brought up together. But you know all this, professor! We've inherited the notion of immorality; we don't heed the warning those old fellows were trying to give us, of the dangers of familiarity."

"I see what you mean," said Jepson.

"Our hidden folkways acknowledge it!" cried Street. "Here, suppose we marry a girl who has all the attraction of strangeness. We fall in love with her little foreign way, not of our tribe. When we get her home, we begin to make her over into the ways of our tribe. Even the sense of her strangeness begins to wear off. We see too much of her, she of us. We make our marriage run the risk of non-attraction. No other partnership could stand the strain we put on that relationship, the one we are pledged to for life. The sweetheart may have become the model wife and mother, and we marvel that we give her respect instead of love, and that our fancy wanders afield where attraction is, and mystery. I for one will not subscribe to the belief in the incurable animalism of man, in his inherent infidelity. It's our stupid, man-made customs!"

A stimulating fellow, the American. He puts things differently. Gives bright new words to one's own dull rebellions!

"We put such an asinine strain on this partnership! We chain ourselves together, swear ourselves away together, oh, we do get a wonderful thrill, though, swearing ourselves away! It's like going into a monastery, or a convent, or war, not knowing what you are going to get into, declaring you will live and die, and more than that, *want* to stay there!

"Then we make ourselves over at once into Siamese twins. Always together, except during business hours. We make a parade of our constant togetherness. Have to be asked out together, as Siamese twins. Not quite right after that swearing-away ceremony ever to be seen with those of the other sex, that is enjoying one's self. A taboo at once on that, that innocent pleasure stopped, made more desirable because of the taboo! One has to pretend that one doesn't want ever again to see and enjoy those of the other sex, pretending, always pretending! Pretending ardent love, when one is in love with the foreign-way woman around the corner, though quite well satisfied with one's wife as the mother of one's children, or as a housekeeper!

"Pretending to like drafts, because the other one likes all the windows open, and if one doesn't pretend, the neighbours will whisper that dreadful word: 'hen-pecked!' "

Merciless, Street is. His flashlight exposing all the dark corners!

"Pretending, biggest pretence of all, to be happy, because custom has made it the deadly sin to tell the truth about it until it is time to break off, and then one

has to perjure one's self, and has to acknowledge the perjury, drag in witnesses to prove it, drag in all the pitiful secrets to prove it. And maybe the other Siamese twin has a reason for wishing to contest the wish for freedom? Law is on his side, even in our country you call free, or lax. Dreadful, says public opinion, to give a divorce to two, when only one wants it! Instead of—"

Street paused so long that it seemed as though he had lost his thread. Jepson reminded him: "Instead of—what?"

"Make love, the ending of it, end of the contract," mused Street, whom another thought was obviously claiming.

Hornbrook, by this time was almost obscured. His voice sounded sleepy and covered. "Street thinks marriage is for the individual; I think it is for the race."

Street was still musing; reading visions, memories, into the dark wallcovering of the opposite wall.

Jepson answered. "The finest individuals make the finest race, Hornbrook."

"Check, Hornie!" chuckled Fackenthal.

"I would like," stated the unseen Hornbrook, "to take issue with Mr. Street's interpretation of the word 'love.'" They could see his hands making a church steeple of his two forefingers, then the body of the church. "I would call it romance, excitement. Not the emotion we build homes on."

"No, I agree with you, we don't," retorted Street, returning.

"Whereas, if you take the child as the objective," Hornbrook was pulling himself up from his anæsthetizing chair, "you give progress a big shove."

"Heavens, if they get started on eugenics, we'll never have a chance!" cried Jepson, in mock alarm.

"Take your chance," clipped Street. "What do you think of divorce laws 'as is'?"

"Oh, I believe in divorce," returned Jepson, stiffly, playing with the string of his monocle. "I think our present laws antiquated, abominable. But I'm afraid I'm too old fashioned to like the trial marriage, Mr. Street."

"Old fashioned! it's as old as history! The Romans practised it."

"Perhaps," put in Fackenthal, "you know our laws, Mr. Street? One cause, only, and that has to be proved. England keeps a public defender to disprove it! And only one of the pair can urge it, otherwise the claim is denied."

"Needs some stout hearts to blaze a trail," shrugged Street. "What do you think, Mr. Graeme?"

He knew his turn was coming! Like a boy, Street, making a game of conversation.

He began slowly. "My question is this: how long is it right to follow the rules of the game; when is it right to disregard them, and to blaze the trail?"

"It's a fine phrase, 'playing the game'." The American's lips were curling to accommodate his cigarette. "Though it's really suttee. We've a passion for good opinion, we want to seem to stay within tribal custom. The Hindoo widows couldn't be diverted, even if death were the punishment—fear of public

opinion! Respect of the Mores. Inspired idea, that word, connotes a blind, dogged psychology. 'Whatever swings off the hinges of custom,' Huxley said, 'is off the hinges of reason.' "

Fackenthal said he had to be going. Graeme discovered suddenly that the hour was late. Street and Hornbrook were taking up their argument where they had dropped it. They were ready to make a night of it.

Graeme manœuvred for a word with Street. He was going to follow an absurd impulse, and invite the American to dinner.

"Jepson put me up at his club. Address me there," said Street.

Wade followed Fackenthal into the hall, wishing he had a home to which he could invite Street. Picture Street at Bird Place, or talking to Alma?

He wished Isabel could meet him. He was always wishing she could meet his friends. "Taboos on innocent freedoms!" And what was that other thing he had quoted? Oh yes. "Whatever is off the hinges of custom is off the hinges of reason."

He could hear Street saying: "If I were a nation-builder, I'd prefer parents to be happy examples rather than disheartening precepts or warnings, professor!"

"Jepson's got to make a night of it!" smiled Fackenthal, as the front door was opened for them. "Let me take you to your station, Wade," he urged.

The night was raw, and his coat was thin. His hesitation lasted an instant. "Thank you," he said, and followed Fackenthal into the casket depths of the limousine.

CHAPTER XXV

GUESSES

“**A**N interesting evening,” commented Fackenthal, after they had settled where Graeme had best be dropped.

“Rather—candid,” he returned, thinking of some of the things that had been said in Jepson’s library.

“Um, I question the candour!” pursed Fackenthal.

Graeme wondered why he questioned the candour, but he did not ask; his companion would complete his sentence, if he wanted to.

“I admire Jepson,” Fackenthal offered, after a pause. “He is big enough for candour, the kind that helps. But it is just as I said there. He might be willing as far as his part goes, but his story involves others. We find it mighty hard to let our own revolts help others. ‘It is just as I said: the people who talk, talk without experience; those who have the experience, can’t.’”

“He is married, isn’t he?” Wade asked. He wanted to know about men, fine men, like Jepson, or Street. Those two, he felt sure, must have reached an honest solution.

“Lady Strathairn. You come across her name in the papers, always at the head of a board, or something. Her chief interest is a children’s hospital; that hospital is the lengthened shadow of Lady Mil-

dred Strathairn. She and Jepson don't get along; gossips say it's religion, a difference of opinion. Keeps 'em apart, and keeps 'em together. For she doesn't believe in divorce. She has grounds, but she won't acknowledge them. In the north of England, there's another home, a woman, and three children, who look like Jepson. Image of Jepson. I've seen their pictures, he's shown them to me, talked a little to me about them. I know some friends of his, closer than I am, who have visited there. They speak of it as a beautiful home. She is clever; Irish, not beautiful, but lovely, adores Jepson. Of course, he worships her, for her courage, her sweetness. For her truth. For she isn't his wife; her neighbours know she isn't his wife. That's the way he's solved it!"

"If you call it solving it!" Graeme knew that his voice was betraying him, that his voice was rotten. Making his pulse race, thinking of that town in the north of England where the Irish woman lived with the children who looked like Jepson.

"What do you think of it, as a solution?" he asked when Fackenthal did not go on.

"I don't think. Thinking means judging. I'm just recording, Wade. Gossiping, I'd call it, if other fellows were doing the talking! Those three children will do the judging. Maybe things will have straightened out before they are grown; when changes begin to happen, they go very fast—all the momentum, the passion, the hidden thought of the centuries pushing them. It may not hurt them. But it hurts Jepson. If he lied about it, hid her, denied her—but he refuses to do that. It is always cropping out

against him. Such stories do, if one is successful or conspicuous."

Flagrantly obvious why Fackenthal was telling him Jepson's story! Knew something, suspected something. Wanted to nudge him, over another's shoulders, warn him that such stories come up, are used as a club to knock you under if once you get your head above water. Good, old friendly Fackenthal!

"He'd marry her this minute, if he could. His wife must know of those children—but she will die Jepson's wife! Maybe she is honestly living up to a creed, but it looks sour to an outsider. Won't let any one else have what she doesn't want. She hadn't lived with him for years before this happened. Salves her conscience, I suppose, by being an angel to all other children."

"Wouldn't it be better, braver," asked Wade, with deliberation, "if that family lived, say in London, took his name, forced the hand, if not of Lady Strathairn, of law? Wouldn't Jepson then be helping others—blazing a trail, as Street called it? Nobody hiding?"

"They're not hiding. He's too well known, in England, in Europe, to hide a family he spends half of his time with! There's a lot of mud on that kind of a trail—and how much do we really know about any man or woman's life, anyway? We make guesses only about the little we see or know—"

Graeme peered out of the mist-obscured window. They were travelling slowly through the blanketing fog. He could not see where they were.

"Jepson has often talked to me about Street, made

guesses about him." Graeme knew that there was a grin on Fackenthal's face. "He made, it was said, a ghastly failure of his first marriage. He was a pretty conspicuous figure over there then, editor of a weekly liberal paper, before weekly liberal papers were as common as they are now. Everybody knew Street; iconclastic books. He took the failure terribly to heart. It was a failure to him. It was a part of the creed he'd been crying, that a failure there is as much of a disgrace to a person as bankruptcy, that it was the failure which caused the divorce that was the disgrace, not the divorce itself. He declined to be what he would call a Hindoo widow, declined suttee. He said his life was not finished. Jepson read me one of his letters, telling him that he was marrying again, that marriage was for the individual, that the individual was not to be a sacrifice to an institution. The second try was equally ghastly. Both women must have been fearful rotters— Any other man would have stopped there, a man as well known as Street. He sent clippings to Jepson when he tried it again—his world was laughing at him. 'Triumph of hope over experience,' a weekly said. That third marriage, Jepson says, is the rare sort. He has a wonderful wife, quite exceptional children. They are trying out a different sort of plan; she is a business woman, keeps on with it. That's why she couldn't come with him. She's coming later. I want to meet the third Mrs. Street!"

"Trial marriages," observed Graeme, a little disappointed in Street. One mistake he could understand, calf love, ignorance, excitement, and all that, but two,

with experience and suffering behind one to make one's steps wary?

"The states seem to be headed that way, but Street's personal creed interprets that as transitional. He thinks the time's coming when people will feel the same shame in failing in marriage as they do at failing in a profession, any other profession, I remember he wrote to Jepson. The phrase stuck in my memory. I liked the suggestions it raised, making a profession, an art of marriage, of daily life, Wade."

Graeme liked it, too. He liked the suggestions it raised, of rose-bowered rooms, of gracious living, books read together, a friendship saved by art from the commonplace.

"Professor Hornbrook?" inquired Graeme when it dawned on him that a charged silence was lengthening.

"Oh, Hornie!" Graeme could feel Fackenthal's shoulders shaking. "A sly dog, Hornie! I used to go to school with him, we were in college together—he always liked the ladies! Has to like them now with circumspection. His lady keeps a sharp eye on the professor! In love with love, we used to say behind his back. He takes now a scientific interest in love and marriage; has become a professed eugenis—gossipy old woman I am tonight, Wade!"

"They're probably gossiping about us." Stupid, common remark, he accused himself.

"They're welcome to their guesses. Nobody really knows much. I've never talked about that side of my life. There has never been but one woman, really, the solemn way, in my life. When I couldn't get her,

I didn't marry, didn't want to marry any one else. Sometimes, I think I made a mistake, not marrying. It's lonely—when your imagination gets to working. Children playing by the hearth, or by a Christmas tree, *they* start your imagination working! Or children running down a garden walk to meet—somebody else! I wonder if ever a lonely man gets too old to have that hurt him, seeing children running to jump into their father's arms? But if every time you think you'll do it, another woman's face slips in, if everytime you think you can put some one behind that coffee urn, you see *her* face, why you can't do it, you know you are wrong to any other woman if you do it, and by and by you are too old."

"You're not too old," began Wade, warmly.

"Yes, I'm too old to begin, Wade. And when I visit the Hornbrooks, or the Knights, people who live like that, watching each other out of the corner of their eyes, I'm glad I never made such a ghastly mistake. Like the poet who said: 'I would live the same life over if I had to live again, and the chances are I go where most men go!'"

If one's guesses can be true, if he knew anything about other men, he thought the man whose shoulders he was brushing would go much farther than the rest. Fine, knightly Fackenthal!

He had a strong impulse to tell about Isabel. If he had time, he would tell him about her. But they were reaching the tube station—he could see the lights—

"Yours was candour, as far as it went," he said holding out his hand affectionately to his friend.

"That's what it all was, candour as far as it went!" returned the older man. "That's what I said. We can't expect the truth on this subject. Can't be done. Good-night, Wade."

The car stopped. Holden, the chauffeur, was crawling down to open the door for him.

He was glad the machine stopped when it did. It was just an impulse, wanting to talk about Isabel to Fackenthal. He might be sorry later, he would surely be sorry later, for he didn't know how much he cared to tell him; and half candour, as Fackenthal said, leads nowhere. Better nothing, than half-truths.

Fackenthal, though, had surmised something. Had tried to warn him: "The story always crops up."

And his own story, Fackenthal's? Didn't he tell him that to help him, to show him that a man can do without the things he wants the most, and yet live a straight life, a useful life, and a rich one?

He had forgotten to speak to Mr. Fackenthal of the dinner for Street. Better, though, to have Street fix the time, first, and then he'd tell Fackenthal.

Social machinery very rusty, Wade. Have to get oiled up, old man! For you're going on. Something tells you that you are going on!

CHAPTER XXVI

FLIGHT

AN office boy told him, with a leer, that a *lady* wanted to speak to Mr. Graeme on the telephone.

On the way to the outer office, Wade tried to quiet his impulse by telling himself that it was Alma. Yet fancy Alma *paying* to speak to him a few hours sooner than dinner time! Unless little Alma might be ill? But something told him that it was Isabel. Something had happened.

He was prepared for her voice, small and frightened.

"Yes, Graeme speaking. Can't you hear me?"

There were clerks about. No wonder she did not recognize his sharp, businesslike tone!

"It's I, Isabel. Wade, can I see you?"

"Is anything wrong?" Idiot to ask her that. Would she bring him to the telephone, asking him to leave the office if everything were all right?

"I don't know whether it's wrong, or right. But—it's over. I've left him, Wade. I'm not going back there, ever."

"Does he know?" He was picking his words so that the clerks might not suspect anything unusual.

"Not yet. He went away for the week-end. I found out—the cleaners let it out, where he was pre-

tending to send his clothes. I've been praying for a chance—I can't stand it any longer, Wade. I didn't know whether to write you after, or tell you this way—but I've got to borrow money. Hateful, having to. But I've not enough to get me anywhere."

"Where will I meet you?"

"The station? I don't want to meet you at any of the old places."

"Which station? I've not enough for—" she would know he meant Paris. That he hadn't enough to take them both there, and leave anything to get along on. "Some nearer place."

His poverty was terribly galling that minute. Not to be able to take her altogether out of that fellow's reach! "Which station?" he repeated, as she had not seemed to hear him.

"Charing Cross?" she suggested, in a dubious, little voice. "One can reach almost any place from there. We can make up our minds, there."

"Will you be planning? I'll be there as quick as I can. I have to clear this desk first, make some arrangements. Let's decide where we will meet. Right of the entrance, no, let's say, more definitely, at the south-east corner."

It was Saturday morning. There would be yet time to find a place for her; Sunday they could talk things out, roam a bit, and plan. He would have to despatch a letter to Alma saying he was going out of town; on an errand for the firm!

He subtracted carefully from his savings. Terribly meagre they were, standing for months of lean

lunches, for renounced tobacco, for night after night of sleeplessness. It wasn't possible to think of Paris. He wished now that he hadn't given that dinner to Street. It had made a big hole in two pounds, giving that dinner, for of course, he had to include Jepson and Mr. Fackenthal.

He found Isabel huddling in her corner at Charing Cross, sitting in the shadow of a newstand. Her looks shocked him. She had gone off frightfully. She was thinner, paler. It was sea-air she needed, Brighton.

"Have you hit on a place?" he asked.

"What do you think of Brighton?" inquired Isabel.

"It's so big—"

"I'll get the tickets. Wait for me here," he counselled.

Sometime, if they ever had time to talk of things which did not demand instant settling, he wanted to talk with her of the trick she had of taking his thought on the wing. Was it only a coincidence, same type of mind, or something more than that? If they were only together enough, it would be an interesting thing to watch, and perhaps to develop.

The length of time they keep one waiting in line for tickets! Ticket men are never in a hurry. They get callous to seeing the world in a hurry. His line hadn't budged over an inch since he came, and Isabel waiting nervously over yonder! He couldn't see her. She had successfully obscured herself, or was in eclipse behind some other woman's feathers. He was thankful that Isabel did not wear feathers.

Line starting at last! That first fellow must have been buying tickets for the north or south pole! And now stopping again!

He fell to thinking what it would be like, being with Isabel during long, unhurried hours. Seeing her the sweet, intimate daily way; watching her drape roses over things; sitting across the table from her, or before the fireside, winter evenings, talking of the books they had read. They would never get done talking of the books they were reading; going out together, to a concert now and then, think of going to a concert with Isabel! or to a good play; walking back through the parks; in the spring when the blossoms were coming out; in the autumn when the leaves were falling. Hurrying home to her, always hurrying home to her! Leaving her in the morning to earn for her more books, more roses, and with the right to return, knowing she'd be waiting— Blood had had that chance, or could have had it. Other men have it; for there must be other fine and gentle women in the world like Isabel. But not for Wade Graeme.

His darling was looking jaded. A few days at Brighton would freshen her, give her courage. And then—next. Paris? If he decided to tell Fackenthal.

He bought second class tickets to Brighton. She was reading a periodical, pretending to read it, when he rejoined her. He insisted upon knowing if she had had any lunch? A cup of tea only? She called that lunch? She didn't know how to take care of herself! Did she like pears? Chocolate was the best thing to take when one's travelling; chocolate and

nuts. And he bought a weekly for her, and one for himself.

In the coach, he established her by an open window, with the pears and chocolate on her lap, resting on her magazine, with the walnuts he cracked for her. He had suggested, as they followed her bags, that it would be better not to seem to be travelling together. And Isabel had thought of that, too.

He took a seat opposite her, and buried himself in his paper when other passengers began to get in. Once in a while he would steal a glance at her face as she was staring out at the passing landscape. The look in her eyes hurt him. That hard look was bad enough in other women, but for Isabel! He remembered her tone at Kew: "Not cruel, yet." Did that grim expression mean that he had begun to be cruel to her?

It was maddening, not being able to talk to her. They had so much to say, dozens of questions to ask her, and caution keeping them to their stranger rôles. He noticed that she could not keep her attention on her paper. What was passing behind that pale mask of hers? Isabel must not have a mouth like that, a hard line, like the mouths of the women of the 'busses, the angry, bitter kind.

He was going to Brighton with Isabel! Pretend that it's an adventure, a happy outing, get the joy out of it, Wade Graeme!

He had mapped out their life quite clearly. He would get her started in Paris, see her once in a while, once a year, maybe, if he could write enough things

for the papers, learn to reel them off, quickly enough. He was too fussy.

Perfect of their kind, he wanted them. To write snappy, concentrated English, that sounds hurried, takes time. To get all the meaning in, every unnecessary word out, that takes time. Pascal knew it! He hadn't time to write a *short* letter!

He would have to learn to do it more quickly, learn not to be meticulous. For he had to earn money for Isabel now. No more dinners for Jepson and his friends—if he were to get her started, if he were to see her once in a while. Carrying his work to her, talking together of their work.

For that was where they had to keep this wonderful relationship of theirs. Steered away from Kew, from disturbing moments like Kew. Everything he'd written since was rotten poor because the taste of her kisses was still with him, because of the yearning to hold her in his arms again. He was conscious this minute of every move of her. Every time she drew one of those piteous, tense breaths, it went across his heart.

It didn't abate his love a bit that her beauty was obscured. There were dark lines under her eyes; the eyes were lustreless, her lids were red and swollen. She had the look of one with influenzo. But she had assured him that she was not ill.

Not her beauty that *he* loved. He loved her because of her truth, the beauty of her spirit. She was like his mother in that. Like her, too, in her sweetness, her gentle gaiety, her fragrance. Not beauty? All of a piece, her beauty, spirit, face, Isabel!

One can't define that sort of attraction. Some women have it, others haven't it, and that's all one can say. Call it charm, but one can't capture it with words. It's like beauty. Give one woman regular features, a good skin, and she passes unnoticed in a crowd. Give the same to another woman, and there's a radiance that startles every one. That's beauty, beauty like Isabel's.

She could never do a little petty thing which would make one ashamed or sorry. One must always be striving to be worthy of *her*. It was those highbred reserves of hers he loved; and her aspirations; he loved her sense of beauty; her sympathy; he would love her sad, or happy; young, or aging; he would love her for ever, when dead.

Dead! His words had carried him into the shadows! Isabel dead! He gave her such a sharp questioning look that she turned to it, permitting a ghost of a reassuring smile to answer him. "Why she was all right! Brighton was all she needed."

His neighbours began to bestir themselves. They must be nearing Brighton? He hadn't noticed them before! Two or three week-end men, family men with bundles from London, a woman with a child and a bandbox.

He had no boxes nor bags. Isabel had several heavy bags. She'd prepared for a long stay, had his Isabel.

Then it was Brighton, with the guards bustling them out, and the porters calling, and in the distance the hotel runners advertising their hotels.

As though she were a stranger, he addressed Isa-

bel. Couldn't he help her with her bags? He had none. She said he was very kind.

He kept behind her. But they might have been in Egypt. No one was noticing them. There was no one they knew. Hordes of people were waiting for friends from London; there was nobody who could expect them. It would be queer if Blood had come to Brighton for the week-end. It was, of course, possible. He must caution Isabel.

"Shall we go to a hotel?" he asked her. "Or to some quiet place?"

"Oh, a quiet place, surely!" she answered.

"I'll hunt up an information bureau. If you will wait here a minute."

He came back with a list of addresses in his hand. "We can surely find something from these. Some are close by. Do you feel like walking?"

After that long ride, Isabel wanted to walk. But she did not want to be near the station where people were passing all the time.

There was no need, he told her, of her walking up all the steps to look at rooms. He would look at them, and if they were endurable, he'd come after her. He had left her bags at the station, with a porter. He would send back for them when they'd found quarters.

He added that he had asked for addresses on side streets. His only reason for asking for houses near the station was to save time when he came up Saturdays.

"How thoughtless of me," she exclaimed, suddenly radiant. "Why this neighbourhood is quiet. Have you any numbers on this square?"

"Two on the next," he answered, looking at his list.

At the corner, he hastened ahead and before joining her had interviewed two landladies. He thought he'd found something she'd like. On the second floor. "You're going to be my sister, remember," he cautioned, hoping to see her smile again.

"I don't look the part!" And she told him soberly that she was going to use her mother's name, Sorbier.

A thin, capable driver of a woman met them in the hall, where she was waiting. She had a slit of a mouth, and keen, appraising eyes. It looked as though it had been torn, Graeme decided, looking at her again. It was like a rent, her mouth.

"I'll show you your room, the one your *brother* picked out. *His* is downstairs."

He must remember Sorbier, Isabel Sorbier. He must find a new name for himself, or wasn't that necessary? He decided that it wasn't necessary. Nobody would be searching for him. He didn't want any more lies than were necessary. They were mischievous things. They lead one into traps— He hated them more than the deadlier sins.

Isabel came back, saying that her room was all right. Was his as comfortable?

Anything would do for him! He'd be down so seldom.

"How long will the lady be here?" demanded the landlady, and he discovered the suspicion in her world-hardened eyes.

Isabel waited for him to answer. "Oh, indefinitely," he returned.

On their way to the street, he asked Isabel if the

woman had told her that she did not serve meals, only a continental breakfast, if she would want that?

Was she too tired now to go in search of dinner, for that was where he was carrying her. Or would she like to have him send her something? He thought her step was dragging.

She wanted to go in *search* of dinner! She wanted to see Brighton!

"Shall we walk about a bit, first, then?" And as she fell into step beside him, he referred to the landlady. "Didn't she glare at us! She doesn't believe in us. She thinks we are—"

"What we are, runaways," she amended, calmly.

In the café, she brightened, became more like the Isabel he knew. He could see her trying to bring gaiety to the meal. But every arrival routed her. She would not speak of it, but he knew that she was expecting to see Blood stalk into the room with some flashy woman at his side. Her eyes dilated each time a man of his type strode in. It was surprising how many men of his type were in Brighton!

"I won't take you to the beach afterwards," admonished Graeme, "if you don't eat that chop."

So pretty she was again with the flush of joy rejuvenating her!

"Going down to the beach? How nice! How good you are to me!"

"Will you pay me, you know how, Isabel?" To make her flush again; to make her look like his own Isabel.

Pay him! Poverty-stricken refugee, the only way she could!

The trams were crowded, the beach was crowded. Not a corner of Brighton that warm summer evening which did not harbour a cooing couple, or chattering group. After a while, Isabel's feet did certainly drag!

"I must get you home soon. I'm a selfish brute," said Graeme. But first he had to cheer her, he had to get that frightened, despairing look from her eyes. He spied a sheltered place quite a distance up the beach.

"Can you make it?"

Yes she could make it.

When they reached the other side of the spit of rock, he pulled her down on the sand beside him. Registering a vow to himself as he pulled her down to him.

It was not to be like Kew. It was not to be wild and disquieting like that. But tender, like old married lovers, if there be such a paradox. To bring the flush back to her cheeks, the youth back to her eyes.

He held out his arms to her.

"Now, pay me!"

She put her arms around his neck, laying her cheek against his.

"Home, isn't it, Wade?"

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE LATCH

DURING the week he had written to Isabel, telling her he would go to Brighton, and which train he would take. After he had despatched the note, he asked himself why he had mentioned the time he would arrive. He did not expect her to meet him—that kind of simple sweetness was not for them. Was it a servile habit he'd acquired of acknowledging his programs? beginning the same cringing way with Isabel—he pulled himself up abruptly. It was a vulgar, self-directed gibe, that. And not true. One by law his wife, and the other the woman he could only distantly adore.

But it made it *seem* the other relation, going down to Brighton for the week-end, carrying her the weeklies, and a box of chocolates! Exciting to be running away; as though in happier days, when week-ends were not novelty.

On the train, his eyes closed, he made himself acknowledge why it was exciting. Not because he could pretend he was the Wade Graeme of Surrey, on his way to visit the Knights over Sunday, but because it was Isabel who was expecting him; just as though he were going home, to Her. Taking her the weeklies and a box of sweets. Hearing the story of the week's simple happenings from her lips, and having her eyes, oh, and her lips, thank him!

His pulses were racing as at Kew. He was seeing Kew, as he sat in the stuffy coach, crowded with vulgar folk, he was seeing the rotting post sticking up from the stagnant water, watching the sunlight sifting down on her face, on the lips which in a few minutes were to yield to his, the way it isn't to be. But not wrong to pretend that it's true. Not wrong to dream that he is going home to her, and that it's all right to be going home, gladly, to her!

He had promised himself to take care of her, and he was going to keep that promise because there was something stronger than himself, he didn't know what it was yet, Mores, instinct, making him want to. But that promise could not keep him from calling her to him in that dusty, crowded coach, making her speak to him, telling him what Isabel alone could tell him. Seeing her, in her room of roses; holding her in his arms, as at Kew.

His comrades were probably thinking him a blasé Londoner, on his way to spend Sunday with his commonplace family! A little bored with the prospect, preferring a dinner at Claridge's and a vaudeville after. With his heart pounding against his ribs, because Isabel was waiting for him.

She was with him during the journey, telling him about her books, about Annersley, until the train pulled into the Brighton depot. He had forgotten his note he had sent to her, he wasn't thinking of seeing her at the station, the real Isabel, and was passing with the rest of the sheep through the gate when his glance fell on her, on Isabel in a white cotton frock and the grey hat laden with purple lilacs. She was scanning

the faces as they passed; in a minute she would discover him—

His surprise made her flush crimson. Suddenly she realized what an untoward thing she had done, coming to meet him openly, joyously, as though quite an honest sweetheart, quite an honest wife!

It was the second time he had seen shame in her eyes. It was the look he had sworn he would never bring there.

"Angelic of you to meet me!" he said at once, and then as the flush did not fade, he added: "I was wondering if you would."

"Oh, no, you didn't," choked Isabel, her face still flaming.

No use lying to Isabel. Even if he wanted to. For she always knew. There were to be no evasions, no subterfuges. Those are the habits of people who belong to one another, unloving, shackled people. Silences and reserves they would have; she rarely spoke of her life—he did not talk of Alma.

In silence, both deeply thinking, they walked on. Wade realized suddenly where they were. "Hold on, aren't we on the wrong street? Going in the wrong direction? Or are we going to the beach first?"

"That's the reason I came. I had to pilot you." As she faced him, he knew what she had looked like as a child, wistful appealing eyes, flushed cheeks, just like a shy child confessing some fault. "I—I moved, Wade, this week. You don't mind, do you?"

Mind, why should he mind? If it were more de-

cent. He didn't want her to be squeezing pennies! For he had had a fear that she would be economizing, doing without decent meals in order not to be a burden.

"It wasn't that. Though this happens to be cheaper. Three shillings a week cheaper. But it is a darling place——"

"Let me do the worrying over the money for awhile, Isabel!"

"I said it wasn't that." It was truth which was coming out to him from the eyes which had threatened swift tears when his stupid surprise had betrayed him. Like the sun coming out through rain clouds, her smile. "It was because of that frightful woman, the other landlady, so—scornful!"

"Rude to you! Not decent to you!" cried Wade, angered at once.

"Sceptical!" confessed Isabel, flushing again.

"Oh, sceptical!" He was beginning to understand. She didn't believe that brother story. He remembered the look that had piloted him to the room on the lower floor.

"We shouldn't have told her that," said Isabel. She was coming to a halt in front of a vine-covered cottage, with a pocket handkerchief of a lawn in front.

"That woman said the brother and sister story is outworn in Brighton——"

How was he going to send that shamed look from his beloved's eyes? He interrupted her.

"You found a place nearer the station. That was thoughtful of you. Fully five minutes nearer——"

"I hope you like it." Such a shy, uncertain Isabel. "The rooms are not so big. But the garden in the rear is a delight—"

"I like it already," he declared. "Do you go out for your meals?"

"She serves breakfasts, and she is accustomed to having meals sent in. She has given me a little stove to fuss over, as she calls it, when the days are bad. But we haven't had a bad day yet. But it's nice to be able to brew one's own tea, or make a cup of chocolate. I can do it for you, Wade, if we feel like staying in when you're here."

Life suddenly delirious because Isabel was talking to him about homely things like brewing tea, or making chocolate! 'Trust Isabel to find a cosy nest. She had the home instinct.

As she passed up the steps ahead of him she was searching through her purse for the key.

"I'll show you your room, Wade."

She went on upstairs, stopping at the first door from the landing.

Through an open window of the room the scent of honeysuckle was blowing, honeysuckle which he could see framing the window, and a heavier-scented fragrance from the garden, out of eye-reach. There were vases, flower-filled, standing about. Flowers on the dresser, and on the table. Books, too, Isabel's books, of course. Gave it the homelike touch.

He crossed to the window, and leaned out. Jolly garden, down there, a jolly old fashioned garden! Honeysuckle and sweet-williams and roses. Bushels

of roses. The honeysuckle had been growing there for a man's lifetime; like ropes, its stems.

"It was awfully clever of you, finding such a place!" He turned towards her. She was standing in the centre of the room, her eyes the colour of the lilacs on her hat, her cheeks softly glowing. Brighton had already brightened her. His French rose, trying to grow in a drab London street!

His arms went out to her.

"Not once? Not once to welcome him?"

She hesitated an instant, in that new shyness of hers. Shy, but trusting him. As she came softly towards him, as she lay in his arms for one glad minute, her heart beating against his, her lips answering the message of his loneliness, the pretty lilac-burdened hat fallen to the floor, wonder came again to him at her trust in him.

What gave her this belief in the sanctity of love such as theirs? Must not all love, even guilty love, seem splendid to lovers? She came to him as to a haven. It bewildered and humbled him. It made him hate the man at Bird Place. It tempered his kisses, controlled his delight, quieted the pounding of his heart, the way she trusted him, the poor, piteous, childish, womanly Isabel!

He let her move away from him. He moved towards the window, looking down into the tangle, breathing its sweetness, as though it were Isabel's, as though it were Isabel.

"How soon will you be ready?" she asked from the door,

"We are eating out? Two minutes," answered Graeme.

After she had left him, he was smiling at the easy way the flushes came to her cheeks that day. His question, "Eating out?" had disquieted his nerves, too. For all the world like happy, sedate married folk; who inquire: "Are we dining out, or at home, tonight?"

No one was in the corridors when he emerged a minute later. No one was on the stairs, or in the lower hall. He found Isabel waiting in the little parlour on the ground floor.

They went towards the beach, strolling, their eyes meeting occasionally, each glance an electric shock for Graeme, whose excitement was returning. He wished they had not left the vine-covered cottage where he might still be holding her in his arms.

At the restaurant, he ordered fish, but he might have been eating autumn leaves, or ortolan's tongues. She was not doing much better. When the music began, a violin and piano inadequately played, it came to him what they were going to do. They were going to listen to some good music together. He confided his wish to her. She agreed that it would be wonderful. Where would they go?

"Is there anything good running, opera, concert?" he demanded of their waiter, not long, he had just confided, from *Sorrent'*.

"Konsairt, no. But the oper' at the Metropole, is good, Puccini, vair' good."

"Let's try it," and Graeme recklessly paid his bill without glancing at the items. A little later, as reck-

lessly he was paying for two seats. Rear seats, where Isabel and he could hold each other's hands, like vulgar sweethearts.

He had never before heard *Butterfly*, nor had she. It was wonderful to be listening to it, by her side, hearing it with her ears, too, liking the bits she especially liked; he knew when she liked it most by the thrill that passed from her fingers into his. He felt her shiver when the story shook her, when the girl began her long vigil by the window, watching, watching—

Lovers tonight, Wade Graeme and Isabel, Bird Place swept aside, their eyes confessing to a joy that was sheer pain.

He bent over her to get what she was whispering.

"I have to keep saying: It's *not* real. It's not true! I couldn't bear it if it were true!"

"It's too sad for you, darling."

Nothing was sad when he was close to her, protecting her—from life! Nothing was sad when he called her that.

Mingling with the outgoing throng, they forgot to look at the faces to see if by mischance there were any one they knew. Isabel knew few people; most of his friends had forgotten him, and if they saw him, what did it matter?

He held her arm close as they were jostled into the street. Going home together, like two old married people after the show. A rummy trick life had played on them that it was only as the husband and wife of somebody else that they were going back together after the show—going home.

"The beach? Wasn't it too fine to go in?" He meant that it was too soon to go in!

Perhaps, if he wanted to. Though she was a little tired. Queer, she said, what music, good music does to one. She felt as though she had been working hard, and she had done nothing all day, except to pick a few flowers. Their cottage was in sight. A thought struck him, halting him.

"You began to tell me something this afternoon. About that other landlady."

"We aren't enough alike, and it's over-used, in Brighton,"—he had difficulty in hearing her.

"I hope it wasn't very unpleasant. Nasty, was she?" Just the type to be nasty; he recalled the mouth that was like a slit, the cold, world-hardened eyes.

"I just couldn't stay. She told me that her house had to be kept respectable—oh, you know just what such a woman would say. But these people are sweet, a widow and her daughter. They were out when you came. They both work."

He was enjoying her delicious pauses, her embarrassment. He felt like sixteen. Loving her! Wanting to tease her, and not daring to. Not daring, because any jest might bring too swift a wound.

He seized the other arm, and turned her to him.

"If I am not your brother any longer, then what am I?"

As if he needed to ask her what he was supposed to be! Coming down to spend the week-end with her, to dine and sup and breakfast with her—to lounge the day through with her. His prankishness was giving

place to excitement again, his pulses wildly beating because her smile could not be brave.

"Let's not go in yet. It's too soon for this night to end. Are you sure you aren't too tired for a walk to the beach—just there and back?"

She wasn't too tired for the walk there and back.

His hand held her arm as they passed from the quiet backwater of a street into the main thoroughfare where the theatre crowd was passing. They knew he was not her brother, those two women, at the cottage. They thought he was what he'd give gladly the rest of his life one day, one hour to be!

He was walking too fast for her; he discovered that he was pulling, almost carrying her. She was a bit out-breathed? They would pull up for a bit until she got her breath back— "It's a jolly little place in there, Isabel, nice, jolly, little shop. Wouldn't an ice, or a cold drink, go well? Top off the spree with an ice!"

"Aren't you being dreadfully extravagant?" she demanded.

And then her eyes acknowledged that that, too, was a wifely question. They fell before the look in his. Not the way husbands, long-established husbands, look at one!

Slowly they walked home together, fingers finding each other's and clinging together. Nothing being said; nothing to be said. Silence throbbing around them, the night whispering to them; the waves breaking on the beach, merging with the soft call of a muted violin: like a man's strong yearning for a woman's gentle sweetness.

They had left the crowded thoroughfare, and had found other quiet, backwater streets where darkened cottages and silent gardens made the world, and the night seemed made for them. The pounding breakers, the violin's soft straining, the air's subduing fragrance, the star-pricked sky arching down and shutting out the rest of the hostile world made that night, and Brighton, a lover's haven.

How many other lovers were crying to themselves that minute that it was damnable to have made it so sweet, so inevitably compelling, the love of one man for one woman if anything called Right could keep them apart! If this were not right, this love of his for Isabel, nothing then in the world was right. Something outside of themselves was pushing them; caught in a swift-flowing current they were being swept where he had promised himself they would not be swept. But he hadn't known it was going to be like this,—like drowning, resisting, trying to keep one's head above the sea, and being buffeted by the waves, subdued, and carried out towards the ocean—

He could see their gate. The scent of honeysuckle and other garden fragrances came running to meet them. He caught the rich smell of recently turned earth, wet earth, and the perfume of mignonette. He hadn't thought of that flower since Surrey. Below the French windows it used to grow. He wished Isabel could see Surrey. He wished he could take her there. She called for a setting like that, serene and right, just as she repelled the thought of the Bohemian circle of the Korniloffs—

How long had they stood lingering in the garden? They had to go in—sometime. That's life. One goes in, or goes past. Isabel's key was entering the lock.

The lower hall was dimly lit. Silence brooded over the house.

He paused at the foot of the steps, looking at Isabel.

"Upstairs, too. All the sleeping rooms are upstairs. The rented ones. They have two other boarders."

She turned out the light at the foot of the stairs. He could hear her groping for the handrail. He, too, felt, for the railing, and touched her fingers. His arm went round her, to guide her up the dark steps. The scent of honeysuckle filled the house.

The upper hall was dark; the rooms were dark, no glimmer of light coming through the quiet transoms. Slowly, they mounted the steps, their fingers finding the other's again. They stood for a minute on the landing, a long-drawn-out minute. Clinging together, desperately clinging together, their heartbeats sounding like dynamos in the quiet hall. Somewhere, below, a quiet, passionless clock ticking time away.

He was asking himself where the strength would come to end it. Something stronger than himself was holding him there. It was almost like relief, the pain, when she tore herself away from him. Something had to end it.

Noiselessly, she opened a door.

"Your room, Wade." Her skirts brushed past

him. In the darkness, he felt her fingers glancing past him, groping for the wall; he heard another door open.

He stumbled into his room. Shutting the door, he stood with his back against it, as though to shut out the tide, the current which had been tearing him from every mooring he had ever recognized. He thought he had the strength. It was Isabel who had ended it, Isabel who was stronger than he. He would still be out there, straining her to him, devouring her sweetness, it was she who had had the strength, she who had saved them.

He heard the soft shutting of a neighbouring door. Isabel's. A light flared out into the night, revealing the framing branches of the honeysuckle. From the next room. Isabel's.

A chink, a mere wisp of light was falling on his rug, from the opposite wall. Through a keyhole. There was a door over there. A door between his room and Isabel's. Of course, the landlady would give them adjoining rooms—thinking them what they were not—

He heard something throbbing in the room. Coming in through the windows—the sound of the breakers beating on the beach? He held his breath to listen, and the throbbing stopped. His heart bursting, breaking on that forbidden shore!

He stood watching the wisp of light, watching it flicker, go out, and come back again. A soft rustle on the other side of the door, as Isabel moved softly about, preparing for her rest. Watching the shadow

her passing threw. No shadow ever falling from Isabel herself. Like blessed sunlight, Isabel, making thoughts, as plants long since thought dead, start a blossoming. And like moonlight falling on ugly walls, silvering them and giving them dignity and beauty. He wanted to think of her that night as moonlight. He wanted to quiet this pounding of his heart by telling himself that this wild surging of his blood would pass, that she meant more than joy to him, that when this was over, she would mean peace and strength, peace yielding strength, and strength renewing peace. Even while his heart was thumping against the walls of his ribs, he knew what she meant to him, what this wild moment wanted to steal from them.

A door was being gently opened into the hall. Isabel's door. He heard her going out into the hall, shutting her door, and a minute later, another door opening and closing.

His hands feeling the darkness, beating the air that he might not collide into furniture, he moved drunkenly towards her room. Not walking towards her door, that he might touch it in the darkness, but being pushed, being swept. His hand touched the wooden surface. His fingers moved towards the knob.

Slowly, he turned it, but the door did not open. The door was locked. Of course, the door was locked.

His fingers made a discovery. The key was on his side.

While she was out of her room, he could open the door, get a swift picture of her setting. He wanted

that picture, of her flowers, and her books and her roses. It would be only a glance, before she came back—

Unlock that door, Wade Graeme, and expect to lock it again? With that tide bearing you away, that storm surging in your ears? The influence of the music still with you, the perfumes of that garden below overcoming you; people in the house asleep; everybody sleeping but yourself and Isabel, the woman the cottage people think is your wife, so they leave the key in the door.

Not wrong to turn that knob, and look at the nest of his beloved— If he yielded to the force which was then trying that key, would he have the strength to leave when Isabel came tiptoeing back?

Turning the key deliberately, and taking it out. Dropping it on the floor in the darkness where it can't be found unless a match is struck, and he wasn't going to strike that match! The door locked, the key falling softly to the floor, lying on the dark floor.

His face pressed against her door. Not praying, the feeling too deep for words which left him stranded, his cheek against her door. Like a prayer, the cry which was going up from that dark room at Brighton, that the eyes he loved might never look shamed or sorry because of his love for her.

He could hear a step creaking, then another, Isabel going downstairs. A minute later, he saw a light from the lower floor flickering on the tree-tops of the widow's garden. Then blackness again, and the steps creaking, a sound of ice clinking against a glass pitcher

as Isabel carried it guardedly through the sleeping house to her room.

To his room. He heard her setting it down, softly, at his door, the one which led into the hall.

The shadow of her passing fell again across the rug, the chink of light larger because of the key which was lying somewhere on the dark floor. He could hear her brushing her soft, beautiful hair, and he wanted to see her brushing it. He heard her moving about her room, softly, so as not to waken the others sleeping near her. Once, the soft footsteps came to his door, pausing, as though she were listening, as though she wanted to ask is there anything he wants? and say that she had left drinking water at his door. He could hear her soft breathing as she listened, wondering whether he were so soon asleep, the thief with his cheek pressed against her door! He said a wordless prayer when he heard her going away.

Praying the minute before that she would speak to him, and then thanking God that she did not. Wanting to whisper to her, telling that he was there in the dark, his face against her door. And being glad that it was over. Being glad that she had gone. Nothing even now to prevent his striking a match and finding that key. But he wasn't going to strike that match. The key was going to stay on the floor.

The wisp of light was getting smaller. Isabel was slowly putting out the light. Still a wisp of light, slender, rosy. A night light being left. Isabel going to sleep—

Loving her! Loving her!

Damned honeysuckle stifling him! He felt cramped and cold, but he didn't dare move away yet, for some time yet. When he was sure that she was asleep, he was going to creep out of that room where the honeysuckle was smothering him.

He thought he might rest awhile first, stepping softly on the rug, so that Isabel would not hear him. The bed springs were noisy; they creaked when he threw himself on the coverlet. He had an infernal headache.

A fiend planned it, making it so damnably hard, so damnably sweet. And making it seem right,—that the devil's touch!

Or, if it were not wrong, a love like this, then terrible the martyrdoms which deny themselves to love! Who can blame the boys and girls, men and women who haven't been taught to struggle, who haven't been warned that it's going to seem right? Can it be as hard with them, or is it only when it is a woman like Isabel, with fragrance and charm as well as sweetness?

Charm of goodness, that's the pull of Isabel.

Can love come like this to rough men and women, to the boys of the city streets and their vulgar sweethearts? *Love* that leads on to night-walking and the swift moth-like death? Hard to believe it can be so. Makes one shudder at life— But those men would love in their own way, wouldn't they? And would love their own kind. So to them, it would be as hard. Fiend who made it so, or martyrs keeping it so?

Isabel felt safe at Brighton, she said. Safe from Blood, she meant. She was going to feel safe from him, too. The key, lying on the floor, his letter,

would tell her in the morning, that she was always going to be safe with him.

He was already glad that it had ended so. For it had ended. He was going back that night to London, and he wouldn't come back until he could trust himself with her. A queer exaltation was coming to him, the elation of conquest. It made him feel more than a man that minute, being master of himself. Maybe it isn't a fiend. Maybe that's the answer? This feeling of his he had before, once when he had had to fast, at college, for a lost bet. When the first hunger passed, a stimulus took its place, mind and spirit both quickened, the body rarefied, exalted.

It was an hour or so later when he got up, wondering if he had slept. He crossed noiselessly to the window to look at the sky where a gibbous moon was rising. He had thought the dawn was creeping in. He could see the outline of the sleeping garden, the paths, the massed beds where the hollyhocks were swaying their heavy heads, a soft, upspringing breeze swaying them.

Isabel's shade was up. The curtains were blowing apart. A shaded light was giving a faint rosy glow. He could see the foot of her bed, where a coverlet was slipping to the floor. If he leaned out the window, he could see her sleeping, Isabel sleeping— He could swing from that honeysuckle branch, stout as a man's forearm, into that room, through the open window where the curtains were blowing—

Instead, he was going to pull his own shade close. He was going to strike a match, and find out from his railway guide what hours the London trains left.

One left at four-thirty. It must be past that now. His watch insisted that it was not yet three-thirty. He had time to scrawl a letter to Isabel, telling her why he must leave her, and that he may not be back for a while. Going to tell her how he adores her, how he wants her to keep her trust in him. Going to tell her that when she reads that note, he will be back in London, working harder than ever, to earn the money which will take her to Paris.

What he did write was: "Isabel, understand it! Wade."

Letting himself out quietly into the dark hall, he moved down the steps, stopping on each one because it creaked, and groping slowly through the narrow lower hall for the door. A moon-washed street waited him.

Once safely out of the house, he hastened, running lest his watch which was getting unreliable were wrong and he miss that train. Ten minutes ahead of time he panted into the drowsing station.

He awoke several times before he reached London. It seemed strange to be going back to London. Dreaming of grotesque things, of honeysuckle growing out of a keyhole, he would waken to find his neighbours snoring, swaying against him, keeping him awake! And then honeysuckle, ropes of it, like kelp lying on a wave washed beach where all the faces looked like Isabel.

Guards roused him. They were steaming into London.

London. Not Brighton. Morning. Thank God, London and morning!

CHAPTER XXVIII

REVELATION

BLINDLY, he made his way towards the office. He could not go home. Alma would insist on knowing what the matter was, for hadn't he told her that he would be away until Monday? His spirit felt defenceless to her onslaughts. He was exhausted, moreover, from the night's vigil.

Even his short naps in the train had been troubled. He had been jostled by his neighbours, the air had been bad, because one man was afraid he might keep his cold to himself. The rest room was beckoning to him. He went on to Fetter Lane.

It was noon when he wakened. He had slept like a drunken sailor!

Isabel, he thought, had been up for hours. She had discovered his flight, had discovered the note which he had slipped under her door.

He could think now, calmly. Only a few hours away from that frenzy, and grateful that he could think of her without bitterness or regret. He could be picturing her in her room which she had beautified with books and flowers, seeing her making chocolate, and reading the letter he had written her.

It was too late for church, or he'd go in search of some splendid organ music. This feeling of renunciation that still held the thrill of exaltation demanded

that sort of outlet: choruses of soaring voices, or the *vox humana*. But it was too late for church.

He would find breakfast in the neighbourhood, and then spend the rest of the afternoon, riding around London. For he couldn't face a Sunday at home, even if he wished to meet Alma's questions. Nor could he write, or read, when all he wanted to do was to live that night over again, to think of Isabel.

Hours later, after dusk had fallen, he let himself into his own hall. He was astonished to hear voices. So surprised to hear a stranger's voice coming from the sitting-room that he paused, his key in the lock, listening.

Alma's words were the first he caught. Amazing words Alma was uttering.

"I've no more money. I can't squeeze out any more without his knowing. He's beginning to think something's wrong, he asks questions about the money, about the cost of things."

"I don't care how you get it, or what he asks." The stranger's voice was speaking. "But I'm in a hole, and I've got to have it. Borrow it. Take it. Or I'll have to go to him, or write to your father."

Alma's voice came back swiftly. "You wouldn't do that! You can't go to him, after all these years, let him know how you have been crushing me! Then all the money will stop. You'll get nothing. You'll kill the goose with the golden eggs, and you know it. I'm the goose, worse than a goose to have done for you so long."

"It'll be worse for you than me if I do tell him.

He'll buy my silence all right. He won't want people to be knowing how you have fooled him all these years."

Her voice again, troubled, thickened, but not angry. "I almost wish as you would. And get it over with. Sometimes, I almost think as I'll tell him. You ought to be taking care of your own child. I oughtn't to be letting him doing it."

"Your own child." Little Alma! The hand holding the key had not moved. Graeme stood, transfixed.

"You can never prove it. Oh, you're pretending to be brave, you are! You don't want them to know, your father, the rest, and he'll tell 'em all right!"

Graeme heard Alma weeping. Alma! It was a strange sound in that house. Not since the Cape had Alma wept.

Not his child? The child of that man in there? The gold-headed stick that night, *his* stick! Krieger, that's why she's crying, afraid of him, doesn't want him to know. She planned to be out that night, on the mountain, then, she knew what her father would do. Somebody had to save her from her father's rage, and he was the sacrifice! All those years!

Hated him! Of course, she'd hated him! Her condition! he sat down on the front step, laughing aloud. He saw people passing, and staring at him as he sat alone there, laughing, hugging his knees. Said she'd fallen downstairs. Fallen downstairs!

Alma's scared face peered out at him through the dingy curtains. He could hear a scuffling of feet into the dining-room, and out into the kitchen. He didn't

want to meet him, he needn't be afraid. He didn't want to soil his hands with him. She wasn't his wife, really, Alma wasn't. Not his wife!

Thank God! He owed her nothing. But what did she owe him?—

“Come in the house. For God's sake, Wade, come in, and shut the door. All the neighbours hearing you.”

What did those terrible crushing years mean? He had been knuckling under to her, thinking himself a failure, helping to support that cur. That sordid, vulgar house, the starvation of his soul, for that cur, where had he gone? He wanted to crush his head in, but Bird Place? He owed them, Alma and that cur, Isabel.

“Come in. They will think you are crazy,” pled Alma's white lips.

He stared at her hard, calculating face, without heeding her words. Had she ever loved that brute who would have let her be the jest, the scorn of the Cape people? Had it ever been in her to care? Not caring now. Just fearing, fearing that her father might be told, that her people might know. Not minding if *he* knew, unless he told them, cast her off, refused his name to little Alma—as if it mattered to little Alma what kind of a name she bore!

They had stolen his youth from him, his courage. If it hadn't been for Isabel—Isabel, at Brighton, waiting!

He stood up, dusting his coat.

“Come in,” she begged. “I will tell you about it.”

He knew he was looking queerly, for she shrank away from him. She thought he was going to strike

her, did she? That he had grown to be like her kind? Like old Krieger. Thought he was going to send her back to Krieger.

He started dizzily down the steps.

"Where are you going?" she said.

"That," he said, "you will never ask me again."

He was going to Brighton. To Isabel. Not thinking why. Just going to end the irony of it all. He could talk now about Alma to Isabel. He would want to talk to her, to loosen the pent-up shame of the years back of him. He would want to talk to her about his mother, what it had done to his mother. Why had he let that cur go? He wouldn't have let him go if he had thought of what it had meant to his mother.

Going again to Brighton. Queer, to be going back to Brighton.

He would go down to the beach with Isabel, and sit with her, planning the trip at once to Paris, planning to get her started. The money he'd been giving Alma could go now to Isabel. It didn't mean their being together, for there was Blood, although *he* was free—

He wasn't free. He was still in the eyes of the law Alma's husband. Not the father of her child, but still her husband. To be free, he would have to drag her story into court—still he would do that, because of Isabel, if there were any chance of getting free of Blood. Both of them still belonging. With mire to wade through, before they could reach one another.

But freedom for Isabel. That he was bringing her.

The widow of the cottage opened the door for him. He saw her expression harden when he told her who it was he had come to see. He said that he was Mrs. Sorbier's—husband.

"One last night, and another this morning, and then you tonight. She did take me in with her innocent face." She put one foot against the door.

She misunderstood! He hastened to tell her that it was he who had been there last night, leaving early that morning. Business in London. He had to talk to her about it now.

"Then who was the one as took her away with him?"

He was dumbfounded. "Took her away?"

"Called himself her husband, too. And she didn't deny it. Crying, oh yes. She didn't want to go with her husband, one could see that."

Isabel gone?

"It isn't for me to decide which is her husband! She took me in all right, and me with a daughter and name for the house to keep. I'd never have thought it of her with that face! And my treating her like a daughter, lending her a stove! It's references, always after this, for me!"

Isabel gone!

"And me out for a room last night!"

"Did he, did she, pay for her room? That was my business, not her father's, to pay for her room," bluffed Graeme.

He saw her looking at him doubtfully. "Yes, he paid, for her, indeed. Or I would have kept her

things. Not much her clothes weren't, but my girl could have had some use out of 'em."

"I want to pay for my room," said Wade.

"Nobody slept in it," she flung back at him. "You can pay, though, if you were the one that was here."

He added an extra shilling. "Was he a big, stout man? Oldish?"

"He was tall, taller than you. Older. Not old." She was eyeing him dubiously.

"Did they go to London? Where did they send the baggage?"

She shut up like a clam. "It's none of my business where they went. I'm not going to be dragged into any divorce or abduction suit, with the name of my house to keep up. I'll swear I never laid eyes on any of you before!"

She slammed the door. Graeme stood on the porch, where they had stood the night before.

Isabel, in his clutches, again. Isabel, at Bird Place?

Several hours later, he let himself into his own hall. Alma came down in a wrapper to see what he was doing there; to discover, he knew, what he was going to do with her. She was in a fever, of course, to know if he were going to ship her back to the Cape.

"I haven't thought it out, what I'm going to do. You can be finding work—and I'll stay on here, for awhile."

He saw the contemptuous look flicker over her face. She thought him a poor thing, afraid of her, or afraid to be spending money, until the new month began. Not like Krieger, not like the Cape men.

What did he care what she was thinking of him? He had to be at Bird Place, to watch for Isabel.

"You're husky, you can board the child out, and get work during the day. You can be looking out for another house for you and the child, if you're going to keep her with you. I'll board with you, while you're still here. Pay you for my room and board."

He watched her leave the room, in her felt slippers and old wrapper with some of the old bravado in her face. She wasn't going to be sent back to the Cape. That's all she cared about, not being sent back to the Cape, not having people know—

She thought he'd knuckle under, did she? that they would fall back to the same old miserable ways? Well, she could think it. She'd see.

"Keep that—cur—away while I'm here," he called after her, "or I'll break his head for him."

She sent another subtracting, contemptuous look, over her listing shoulder.

She was thinking: "Not a man. Not like my father, or the men at the Cape."

Let her think. He was at Bird Place, near Isabel!

CHAPTER XXIX

HARD LABOUR

HE told himself that he had to put a stop to the deadly round of work and worry and sleeplessness or he wouldn't last much longer. Reeling for sleep in the daytime, his head nodding over his work, having to go over it to see if he had made a mistake and watching to see that Hobbs and Gryce hadn't discovered yet what's the matter with him; dying for sleep, until his head touched the pillows where the demon called Insomnia was waiting for him.

He was doing rotten work; he wasn't earning his salary. Only a question of days when every one would know it, when Knight, the martinet, would know it, and even Fackenthal's kindness wouldn't be able to save him. Fackenthal, the office knew, had his way about most things, but when it came to routine, to the output of work turned out, Knight was the general.

The third day after his return from Brighton, he did the amazing thing of demanding an hour off in the morning, and went boldly back to Bird Place, walking up Isabel's steps, and asking to see the lady of the house.

"Which one?" demanded the woman who had answered his ring. "Mother or daughter?"

She was a servant, and sixty. Graeme met the sus-

picion in her eyes, and answered: "It's your mother, I want to see."

"Well, you can't see her," and the door was shut in his face. But not before he had caught a glimpse of the room of roses, with her books, her basket of sewing, a bowl of spreading ferns on the table.

He had to get a message to Isabel. He wanted her to know that he was leaving Bird Place. That she was to get him at the office, in the daytime, if she could ever get out alone. That she must seize her opportunity no matter when it came, and come to him.

Korniloff was the man who could do it for him. He told the Russian enough to get his sympathy. Korniloff promised gladly to get that message to Isabel if he were allowed to get near her, and would bring back, if possible, a word or a line from her. He was to ask for Mrs. Blood, Mrs. Isabel Blood. For Graeme was convinced that the servant was obeying Blood's orders, trying to trap him by asking if he wanted to see mother or daughter.

The Russian gave a crestfallen report. A woman who looked like a servant had answered the door. She told him the Bloods had moved a few days before. "She did not know their address! She was tired answering the doorbell for the Bloods. She hoped their friends would soon know they had gone."

Korniloff had been instructed to keep his eyes open, and he described the hall, the room he had observed through the blowing curtains before he rang the bell. Shaded lamps, and books, and flowers and cushions, it wasn't likely, the men thought, talking it over, that

Isabel would leave her things behind her if she had gone a year. A year's lease, the woman had told Korniloff, she had taken.

Not yet would Graeme give up. After weighing the various ways by which he might get into the house at Bird Place, he chose drains. His plan involved another morning off, and some workman's clothes, which Korniloff secured for him. The Russian also found a place near Haberdasher Street where he could get into his disguising outfit.

With a bag of plumber's tools in his blackened, greasy hands, his face covered with grease and a week's growth of beard which the office force had not yet ridiculed him into losing, he marched again up Blood's steps. The same woman answered his ring.

He told her that he had come to see about the drains.

She looked at him sharply. "What name have you on that card?"

He had thought this out. He knew he would be asked what name. "They didn't give me no name, just the number, the office said there was a complaint—that I was to go out and see what was wrong, and if it didn't cost too much, more than a few shillings, to put it right whatever it was. If it was a real job, like a half day's labour, the landlord would have to be told first. A tight purse, fancy *he* is!"

The story, he knew, would ring like truth. The group of houses belonged to one man; the Graemes had needed to have drains attended to during that last eight years, and he knew the procedure!

"I haven't heard about the drains choking up," said the woman, uncertainly, still holding the door-knob.

"I don't know that they're choked. I don't know what's the matter. It's the bathroom," he added, pulling a grimy notebook from his pocket.

She was about to let him pass when he could see a thought strike her. "I'll ask Mr.—the master about it when he comes home."

Again the door was shut in his face. He could hear her go into the sitting-room, and he knew he was going to be stared at through the curtains. She looked as though she had recognized him, had suddenly realized that he had been there before. Or perhaps, he thought as he went slowly down the stairs, she had remembered instructions about letting no one in the house. Fruitless, that elaborate errand.

And yet, not fruitless, after all, for as he turned to survey the house, as though to compare the number with that in his notebook, the upper curtains moved, and Isabel's face looked down on him. A brave smile she sent him, and he could not answer it with that woman peering out from the room below. He stared at her, as long as he dared, and then glancing again at his notebook, he slowly nodded. The two women could make their own translation of that nod.

Isabel was there. That meant it was only a question of time before she found a way of getting out, of coming to him. That meant his staying at Bird Place, being on watch, being ready for her summons.

That night, he asked Alma had she found a cheaper place for herself and the child.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I said I would never answer that question again," returned Graeme. "Please notice that I am not asking you where you are going, but when? I want to make my own arrangements."

"How many of these things will *you* want?"

Husband and wife looked at the furnishings with different emotions. Graeme knew that she was fearing he would want the dreadful things—

"Nothing," he felt the muscles of his face tightening. Want anything to remind him of those terrible years? He'd like to burn them, if that would end the memories. If Alma wanted them!

He saw a look of relief spread over her face. As if it were an afterthought, he added: "Leave the things I bought,—my set. I'll—dispose of that."

A few days later, when he went to the breakfast table, Alma was dressed for the street. That night, a scared-looking girl came into the hall when he entered, little Alma clinging to her hand. She jumped as though she had been hit when he asked her if dinner were ready. Dinner? She didn't know how to cook. She was to tend the child!

The changes had begun!

Alma had left the house before he was up the next morning. Her room was in confusion. She was beginning to pack, to get ready to move.

All that day, while his fingers tabulated for his firm, his mind was asking how he could get word to Isabel that *he* was not leaving Bird Place? She would see the furniture leaving the house, she would watch it through those sad curtains, and would think he was

deserting her. How could he get a message to her?

Two nights later, when he let himself into his hall, hollow echoes answered him. Lighting the gas jet, he saw a dismantled house. Alma and the child had gone. That chapter was closed.

Graeme sat down upon the lower step of the inner staircase. He sat there for a long time, thinking. Then he went about the house, making a survey of its emptiness, trying the doors, the windows.

On his dresser, there was a note from Alma. "I've left the water and lights on for you," it ran. "Everything else is finished, and paid for. Alma." She had added a Shoreditch address.

He sat on the side of his bed, thinking. He sat thinking until his head drooped with sleep. When he got into bed, he was wide awake at once. He did not sleep at all that night.

Nor the next.

Then he began to tell himself that he had to put a stop to it. But saying he must stop it didn't bring him sleep at night, nor wakefulness by day.

He was drinking strong coffee for breakfast and luncheon so that he would know what he was doing at the office, drinking ale the last thing before going home, before going slowly past her windows, praying that some night she would look out as he was walking past, and know that he had not deserted her. A thought came to him one night when he realized that the absence of vacancy signs might tell her that some one was there still, even though the furniture had gone. On Sunday, he made a great to do of putting up window boxes, upstairs and downstairs, of having

earth hauled there and dumped in his front garden, just before church time, of having flowers in pots left on his steps. Violets and roses, violet and rose plants. A message of cheer for a passing Isabel.

That night, he slept a few hours. The physical labour, he told himself, was what he needed. But the next night, though he tried all the cures and lures, he did not fall asleep until an hour before rising time.

He was late that day at the office. That evening he bought an alarm clock, smiling grimly all the way home, as he listened to its loud ticking. Queer, after ten years, to lose one's wife, and to acknowledge but one deprivation which can be met by a five shilling alarm clock! Completely independent now of Alma!

But though the clock would rouse him in the morning, it offered him no peace at night. Even its regular loud ticking did not help him. Nothing helped him. If it had not been for the comfort which fell to him on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, he could not have kept going. As it was, he was growing haggard. All the men in the office noticed it. Fackenthal looked sharply at him one morning, the look asking him if he were going to fall back again?

Fackenthal's look sent him back to his writing, but it failed to summon the writing mood back to him. He couldn't write, when all he could think of was Isabel: whether she had seen the message of the window boxes, and knew that he was there waiting—or perhaps had not seen the furniture being carried away, after all.

Several weeks of this misery led Graeme to the discovery that sleeplessness can mean serious illness.

He did not possess much accurate information about symptoms, for he had rarely been sick, but suddenly everything seemed to be the matter with him. He couldn't lay a finger on any of his machinery that was right. His machinery, he told Korniloff, was all gone balmy.

Hospitals and nurses faced him. And then what? Savings all gone, beginning all over again. That couldn't be allowed to happen. Too ghastly, to let that happen. And that would just be the minute for Isabel to send for him, wanting him to help her get away.

He spent an evening with Korniloff and the sympathetic Marie, now deeply interested in Isabel. He told them that he had to break the spell, or he would himself break.

"For God's sake, can't you get me a job," he urged. "Hard labour, anything, Korniloff, digging, anything as long as it's hard. If I can buy three meals a day on it, and pay my rent. I don't know where to go after it. I thought you might steer me. I don't want to talk about it at the office, with Hobbs and the rest."

"Of course you don't," agreed Marie. Korniloff's sympathy was as warm. There was a touch of the feminine, it occurred to Graeme, in Korniloff.

"I've a friend, foreman to a big contractor. I'll write a card. He'll give you what you want, if you're willing to take less than half wages, for you do look rotten, Graeme. No one will believe that you can do a full day's work."

"I'm offering a half one," said Wade.

Korniloff got a job for him, at four shillings a day. Graeme went straight from the foreman's office to Fackenthal's. He announced that he had to have, at once, an indefinite leave of absence.

"Things going wrong, Wade?"

Graeme could see that he was trying to look unconcerned, as though the request were not unusual, and as though it were not a wreck, or a ghost, making it.

"It may be sickness, I don't know. I've never met that Fury yet." He was trying to be casual, sprightly, with that demon of dizziness swaying him, with the demonic singing in his ears. "It's insomnia, beginning that way. I'm drunk for sleep. Dead all day to get to bed, and no sleep when I get there. I can't stand it another day."

Fackenthal's expression agreed with him.

"I can't get through my office work. I've begun to make mistakes, rotten mistakes. I'll be thrown out, pretty soon. I don't want that to happen. I want the chance to come back. I don't want to tell the office what I'm going to do." And he told of the sleep that had come to him the Sunday he had laboured making window boxes, and of his four shilling job.

Fackenthal, he could see, was vastly relieved. "I'm glad you didn't try drugs, or liquor, one of those bad nights, Wade. That's the time men begin. This will pull you together."

"If anything will," thought Graeme. It felt like the end of everything to him. He thought dying must feel like this, seeing everything through a haze, seeing Fackenthal as though afar off, knowing his hands were trembling, and that he had a rotten

glance, like a man who has been stealing, or drinking.

"Your wife knows?"

No, she didn't know.

"If she asks about you what shall I say, my boy?"

She wouldn't ask. He could see that Fackenthal looked troubled, so added, "I'm going back every night to Bird Place." Plenty of time to tell Fackenthal about Alma. When he knew that he could say what he wanted to say.

"Going to begin to-morrow?"

"Going to begin to-morrow, thank God."

"Will you drop me a line, how you're doing? Just lock your desk, and then forget it. You're on sick leave now, till you come back, Wade. Good luck!"

Trying to clear up his desk, and making a mess of it. Dropping the lid, as Fackenthal had advised, and going out of the office, knowing that all the men were looking at one another after the door was shut, and wondering. Going down into the street, and trying to remember which way he was going, and where he was going and why. Eating somewhere, eating something that tasted like sawdust, and then going home, and trying to read. Sleeping an hour, and then going out to eat more sawdust, and then going back to bed to stay awake all night. With the ocean roaring in his ears, and trying to think he was on the ocean, and his ship was plunging, himself getting sleepy from the motion and the sea air; but nothing helped. He might as well get up, and go past her windows, his hat pulled over his eyes. Nobody would be watching at two o'clock at night, unless it might be Isabel.

And crawling back to bed to think about the ocean

and sea air, when suddenly the alarm clock summoned him—

Then excavating a cellar; a cellar some man afar off told him was for a shop. So sleepy that a haze came between him and his shovel and pick, between himself and the faces of the other men. The first hour was endless, and the second; the rest of the day a frightful nausea of weariness and daze and misery. But he slept that night from seven to five when the alarm went off.

In a daze the next day, his muscles so sore that they felt as though his bones were being stripped. But too dizzy and miserable to care. Tired unto death, but thinking of the way he was going to sleep twelve hours that night!

A week of it and the office began to call. The blur was beginning to pass from things, he knew what his companions looked like, and he was sleeping eleven hours every night. He had pleasant thoughts of an easy desk, and a pen, an easy job with men he was discovering an affection for. He made himself face the routine, Bird Place to Fetter Lane, Fetter Lane to Bird Place with no sleep in between, and the feeling of nausea overcame him again. Feeling again like a squirrel in a cage, going back and forth, and back again, worrying, watching her windows, and getting up to watch her windows. He wasn't ready for the routine yet.

He was digging another cellar for a shop, on Bond Street. His muscles no longer sore, and vastly proud because he was earning now a real man's wage. Bond Street needed more room for stock, for toggeries, for

women who think that they are *objets d'art*, and so he is flung a chance to earn some shillings and some more night-sleep. What would the wool and goat's hair clerks think if they chanced on him, flannel-shirted and grimy? Think writing for the *Globe* didn't pay much after all, they would!

Getting up one morning, he had a splendid zest for breakfast. His muscles craved exercise; he went with anticipation to his Bond Street cellar.

He enjoyed loitering that day at noon with one of his fellow labourers, himself with his paper lunchbox bought at a nearby store and the other fellow with a tin box put up at his home. The next day, he enlarged his circle. He found that his fellow workers came from every part of the globe. Men of the gypsy type, who love to rove, and take no heed of the morrow. Foul-mouthed, most of them, their stories as bald as those of sailors, obscene and shocking, to a man who has knocked about, but tender—see 'em when a horse falls, and has to be shot, or when a child ventures too near a caving bank—

He was getting to feel at home with these men, no longer like an outsider. Interesting to be able to feel at home with so many kinds of men, Fackenthal's sort, and Korniloff's and now these fellows.

Though he was worried, still, about Isabel, he was able to think of her without wincing, as though red-hot irons were being placed against his skin. He was rational and rested enough now to see that worrying himself drunk about her was going to do Isabel no good. And that what they had to stand, they had to stand.

That's life, he thought over his lunchbox, as he listened to one man's reminiscences which covered two continents. All of 'em standing something, the things one let's oneself get into. Those fellows, what had they been through? 'D make his life read like a society column in the weeklies.

He promised himself he would stay until he could think of Bird Place and Alma and Isabel and of Fetter Lane, with its figures and its rest room, and his *Globe* articles without that sense of nausea.

Four months after his abrupt leaving, he turned up at Fackenthal, Knight and Company's, one morning, bronzed, hand-toughened, but clear and steady eyed.

"Sleeping?" asked Fackenthal.

"Don't I look like it?"

"Like a bulldog. I'll never fret about you again, Wade!"

CHAPTER XXX

IS THIS WHAT GOD MEANT?

HE was startled from his sleep. In his dreams, excavating a London cellar, and hearing her calling him, his name, and surely Isabel's voice.

Wide awake at once, he jumped out of bed, standing in the dark, listening. Deathly silence from the empty house answered him. But though he did not hear anything, he knew that she was needing him. It was as though he could see her, in distress, and holding out her hands to him.

Without stopping to make a light, he slipped into his clothes. His fingers, stiff and clumsy with sleep and haste, fumbled maddeningly with buttons and straps.

The light was burning low in the hall, as he had left it. He was slipping into his coat as he went down the stairs. He ran down the street towards her house.

He stopped, dashed by his own folly, seeing no one. He told himself that he had been dreaming that Isabel had called him.

A shape disentangled itself from the wall where it had been hiding. Starlight revealing such a piteous, terrified Isabel!

"Wade!"

She was trembling, he thought with cold as well as fear. He tried to take her in his arms, but she shrank from him.

"Just get me away from here, quick, Wade!"

"Are you warm enough?" A storm was threatening. Frost was in the air.

That made no difference, she told him, whether she were cold. Nothing mattered, except to get her away from there. To get away, before he changed his mind.

"What have you on?"

He could see that she was not fully dressed. She had a coat, and what he thought was a wrapper, or housegown, underneath. She had thrust her feet, hastily, into bedroom shoes.

It was all right, she repeated. All she wanted was to get away quickly.

He tried to persuade her to go back to his house with him; there was no one there, and he could gather up a few warm coats; but Isabel was in a panic of fear. It was not safe for her to stay in Bird Place. She was afraid he might leave her.

Leave her? Would he ever leave her again?

He put his hand through her arm, and they went down the street, his thoughts rioting.

Were they leaving it forever, not only Bird Place, but everything, he and Isabel? Was that the way it was going to end, after all, running away together, hiding somewhere? He could feel her shivering.

As soon as he had rounded the corner, well out of sight of the house she had left, Graeme blew for a hansom, standing in front of Isabel, and trying to

shield her from the wind. The light of the street lamp fell on her, showing him that her coat, as well as the things she had on underneath, was thin. He dragged off his own coat, and tried to wrap it around her. Though she gave in at last, and put it around her shoulders, she would not let him do it for her. It seemed a strange, unfriendly Isabel.

A hansom came hurrying towards them.

"Where, sir?" He showed no surprise to find a man, coatless, the man's coat around a strangely garbed woman. It takes a good deal of strangeness to get surprise from a London cabby after midnight.

"A hotel. The nearest decent hotel."

"No preference?"

"Decent and near, I said. The lady's ill."

Ill, and standing on the street corner, a frosty wind blowing, sparsely dressed with her feet shod in bedroom slippers! If it were not so sinister, this thrusting Isabel out into the night, he could have laughed at his stupid words.

Turned her out. Isabel would not have chosen to leave the house in that condition.

Thank God, he'd awakened to that silent cry!

He asked her how long she had been standing there?

She did not know. She had been so frightened. She was afraid some one would see her, like that, she did not know if there were anybody else at his house. It seemed a long time that she had been there, praying him to come past, as she had so often seen him come, late at night, looking up at her windows, but she sup-

posed it was only a few minutes. Suppose he hadn't come!

Shivering, she huddled into her corner, shuddering away from him when his hand went out to comfort her. She didn't want tenderness that night, his poor Isabel!

The hansom drew up with a jerk before a disconcerting glare of lights.

Rummy looking pair to face that brilliantly lit lobby, he in his shirt sleeves, Isabel wrapped in his coat! He told the cabby to wait until he had secured rooms. He bent over Isabel.

"May I have my coat, darling? I'll be back in a minute."

He went to the desk, and registered, giving the first names that came into his head. Two rooms, he wanted. He explained that his was a predicament. His—wife was ill, just out of the hospital. They had neglected, the hospital people, to put in enough rugs. "Careless, but you know how it is, late at night!" He carried off the astonishingly facile lie with a shrug. A wonderful liar he was getting to be!

The clerk assured him politely that he knew just how it was. He rang for two boys to help the lady. Blankets, he told them, were needed.

While they were gathering the blankets, Graeme went back to Isabel. "You must let them carry you in," he told her. "I ordered blankets. They think you are ill."

He had expected opposition from her, but there was none. She did not mind seeming ill.

The two boys arrived, bearing blankets.

"You'll find me very heavy," sorrowed the sweet voice of Isabel.

"'Eavy has ha feather!" gruffed the smaller of the lads.

Graeme followed them, oppressed by the strangeness of it. He ought, he told himself, to be feeling elated. He was glad to have her at last with him, able to protect her, but something, he felt, was wrong. Her manner told him that something was wrong, and her face, in the lobby, appalled him.

There followed a bustling half hour when he was shoved to one side, feeling useless and awkwardly apprehensive. Two women hovered about the bed, administering hot broth, and hot water bottles and warmed blankets. They called it a nervous chill that she was having, those women who did not know that she had been standing, half clothed, in the bleak London wind. A nervous chill! If it weren't pneumonia, he would feel lucky!

Isabel had secured their confidence, as soon as they saw her, in some mysterious way. Graeme watched them, wondering at their friendliness; he could understand their solicitude, but not that degree of sympathy.

When the shuddering began to abate, they wanted to be sure that she did not want a doctor? She was not in pain? There was a doctor in the house; he could be there at once, if she needed him.

She did not need, he heard her say, a doctor. All she needed now, after those nice warm things, was sleep. They had been so very helpful, so very kind!

Uneasy still, they left her, looking back with mis-

givings at the stupid lout of a man who had not been the slightest bit of use, and even now should be sending, in their opinion, for the doctor!

He bent over her bed.

"Can you sleep, now, Isabel?"

"Is the door locked?" she asked him. She could not sleep, unless she were locked in. And where was he going?

His room adjoined hers; should she whisper, he would hear her. But he wasn't going anywhere yet. He was going to sit by the bed, and hold her hand until she slept.

"Wade, I must tell you—"

"Tomorrow, Isabel!"

"Wade, I told him that it was—your child."

Child? His child? A child?

The meaning of it came to him slowly, unrolling, bit by bit. His anger, Isabel's desperate resolve, and turning her out into the street. The gaping maids! That's what it all meant!

She had told Blood that it was his, Graeme's child. And so he had packed her off, let her go, not caring how she went, or where, simply packing her off. Told him it was *his* child.

"At Brighton, I tried to anger him enough to let me stay. I told him I cared. He doesn't yet know your real name. He has tried to make me let it out. I told him I couldn't go back with him, that I didn't love him. I thought at first, he would let me stay, give me up. He was terribly angry, until he talked with the landlady, found out that you had not stayed there; he would not listen to me—"

Told him that it was his child!

"He said everybody has fancies, and gets over them. He said he'd been crazy about another woman, six months before, and got over it. He was going to make me care for him, it made him crazy, after we got home, and I couldn't help showing how I hated him. I used to think I would kill myself— If I hadn't been afraid of making a botch of it, and you, too, I knew you would be sorry— Tonight I lied to him; I had to. I didn't care if he hit me, I prayed that he would let me go, but I didn't dream he would throw me out, not give me a chance to get my things—I was so afraid he might change his mind, remembering how glad I'd be to get away—it was so terrifying out there, Wade. But you came, you came!"

His child. Said it was his child. He ought to be saying something to comfort her, but he didn't know what to say. There was not anything to say to comfort her. There *was* no comfort. His head was pressed between his hands, trying to think of words to help Isabel, and dumb before her.

"You feel that way, too!"

How could they feel any other way, life smiting them like that? Giving her to him too late to be protected.

"You'll try not to hate me, Wade?"

Hate her, hate Isabel? She ought to be hating him, for not hiding her from that brute. She ought to be hating him for leaving her, in Brighton!

But she had placed her finger, unerringly, on his misery. She wasn't his Isabel, now. She could no longer be his, even in thought. She belonged to that

man back there, because of his child. It was no longer right to call her his Isabel.

God, if he could only go back to that day at Hampton, at Brighton, if he could save her from this! He could have borrowed, he could have stolen, to have saved her from this. He had never thought of this—queer, she didn't hate him, for letting her go back to her life, from Kew, for leaving her alone at Brighton, ass, idiot, fiend that he had been!

Trying to play the game fair, when the game itself isn't fair!

The poor, sorrowing Isabel!

"I wish I could see your face, Wade!"

"Shall I turn up the light?"

"Yes. No! Oh, Wade! Is this what God meant?"

He fell on his knees by her bed, his face buried in the covers until her sad little fingers found it, and tried to give it comfort.

Tomorrow, he told himself, he would know what to do, or to say, but then numb from horror and self-reproach! The mockery of it! So abashed before her because he had striven to do right, so stricken with regret! And, together, at last, those two, the barrier between them as wide as death!

Trying to think of something to say to her, some hope. But just clinging to her sad little hands, saying nothing, thinking nothing, just holding her hands.

And the dawn crept in, and found them.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE UPROOTING

IT was a part of the dream that he told himself would break, going to the shops with Isabel's list, and buying things he had never bought in his life before, a woman's shoes, and gloves, and most important of all, she had told him, a thick veil. Buying a hat for her was the hardest task, a hat that could be worn on the steamer, yet would look all right on the street. The girls behind the counter smiled variously at him, some impatient with his stupidities, and others finding it oddly attractive. But whether they liked it, or not, they all smiled. He could see them, looking at one another, getting ready to talk about him when he left, and a few of them not waiting!

Later, he went out with Isabel, an Isabel disfigured in a loose thick coat, and a tightly secured veil. A part of the dream was this different seeming Isabel.

The rest of the shopping she attended to, while he waited by the door for her. And together they bought a modest sized suitcase in which to carry the worldly possessions of the fleeing Isabel.

They slipped like fugitives into a small restaurant, Graeme trying to keep up the pretence of gaiety, that it was a lark, and a part of their plan, running away like this. Over the table, they discussed the program, Liverpool, the steamer, New York; and afterwards to

the steamship offices where he went over the bookings, leaving Isabel in the hansom, her veil wrapped closely about her face.

While she slept that morning, after the sun had risen, he had made their plans. Isabel had fallen asleep, her hand in his, long after he had given up hoping she would sleep. It was not to be Paris, he had decided. Not for a long time now would Isabel be able to "get started," as she called it. For a long time yet, he would have to look after her, gladly, sorrowfully look after her. He should be with or near her, seeing that she did not pinch pennies, or do without the food and comforts she needed. It meant his leaving England, digging up his roots, and beginning again somewhere else, not Paris.

After a long vigil, he decided that it would be New York. English speaking fugitives would have a better chance of getting started—Isabel's phrase! It was to be New York.

He told her when she woke, smiling for one terrible half minute to find him sitting on her bed, and holding her hand. Until she remembered, and after that only pretences of smiles that were sadder than tears.

It meant that he should have more money than he had. He had enough to send her, if she would be willing to go alone? And Isabel was found eager to go alone. She wanted to leave London at once.

He had not been willing to leave her long at the hotel alone, so he had not secured her berth during his early shopping expedition. Things happened to Isabel when he left her. It was she who suggested go-

ing up to Liverpool that day, no matter when her boat sailed. She would feel happier once out of London.

Three days in Liverpool she would have to wait, he told her when he rejoined her in the hansom, and a train was going in an hour. Did she still want to go that day?

Not once, he marvelled, had she complained. She was astonishingly courageous. Not once did she say that New York was far, or that he must write often, or that he must hasten. Instead, begging him not to keep her on his mind; she was really very independent, and being in a strange city, Liverpool, New York, had no terrors for her. She kept telling him how good he was to her,—how she was determined not to spoil his life.

He had written a note that morning, as soon as he had left Isabel's bedside, despatching it to Fackenthal by messenger. He could not be at the office that day. He had to go to Liverpool, he was beginning. He rewrote the note, and said that he was leaving town for the day. Would Mr. Fackenthal lend him forty pounds?

The messenger returning brought him fifty pounds, asking him if that were enough.

It was more than enough to cover Isabel's modest necessities, to pay for her berth, and to cover her expenses in Liverpool. It was astonishing how she stretched out a few pounds! Terribly touching, her unselfishness, trying to do without things, resisting his efforts to make her comfortable, until she saw it was making him unhappy. It was he who had to suggest the things she needed. So glad to leave London, he

believed she would have started with a comb and toothbrush across the ocean!

Their pretences of gaiety missed fire. Misery stalked at their heels. He couldn't plan ahead to cheer her, because of this shadowing misery. Liverpool, the ocean trip, New York, where he would follow her as soon as he could, but no farther. He gave up trying. He could not have so beguiled her, anyway, he told himself, so clear sighted was her love for him.

On the way to Liverpool, she huddled in a corner of the coach, pretending to read; he sat opposite her, his eyes on a newspaper, but he knew that their thoughts were beating together against this new wall of misery. He discovered that it was possible for him to plan the immediate programs: plans for Isabel, and memoranda for her to take with her, plans for himself, when he returned to London, giving up the house at Bird Place, and writing, good stuff, or bad stuff, but every night writing.

He must tell her what to do when she reached New York; how to find a decent place to stay; securing a room at the hospital and about being careful to get the right kind of doctor. He must caution her about that. He would write to Street and get the names of some doctors. He would tell her that. And he must remind her to cable him the day she landed. She would never do any of those money absorbing things unless he asked her to. He must remind her that the only way he could turn out decent stuff was by her assuring him, weekly reassuring him, that she was taking care of herself, and not stinting. Not stinting

about food. He had heard that food was expensive in New York. That must not frighten her into parsimony. Much would depend upon her keeping well!

A group of noisy tourists had crowded into their coach just before starting, when he had begun to believe that they were going to have it to themselves. Conversation was impossible, and they were going to have no time in Liverpool. He decided to write down these items as they occurred to him. A list for Isabel, a nice, little homely list for Isabel, he told her. With a message tucked in between the items, of self-mockery, or reminder, to bring a smile to her lips after he had left her.

She leaned over once to ask him if no other steamer were leaving sooner?

Everything was filled up, he told her, except one of the cheaper sort, the kind that carries no steerage, but everything second class.

"When does it sail?" she demanded. And when he said "Tomorrow," she urged to go then. She didn't mind a few less comforts, she wanted to get started. He could not debate it while all those tourists were about, gay, curious girls who didn't know what uprooting means, what life means to people who try to do the thing that seems right. He promised her he would inquire about berths on the steamer sailing the next day when they reached Liverpool.

Then, at last, Liverpool!

Driving with Isabel to the hotel, telling her as much as he could remember of the injunctions he had jotted down on her list, and putting the list in the new bag. Telling her other things as they ran into his head, and

asking her over and over again to be careful, to telegraph him the last thing before leaving Liverpool, and to cable the hour she reached New York. She would write to him every week?

Then leaving her to get a berth on the steamer sailing the next day, going aboard, seeing a few of the passengers, and going back to the hotel and being advised by the clerks to have the lady take the later steamer. Circus riders, he told Isabel, and a cheap circuit gang were already making the ship into a vaudeville.

Persuading her to wait for the next boat, and telling her at last good-bye. Counselling her to stay in her room as much as she could, trying to be content with the air that came in her hotel windows—plenty of good sea air she would soon be getting. Looking deep into those shamed, tender eyes of his loved one, and praying her for his sake to take care of herself. Asking her over and over again if she could ever forgive him for running away at Brighton. He could never forgive himself!

Asking her if she would always remember that he loved her? That he would follow her, in thought across the ocean, and as soon as he could get started, the other way! That she would remember she would be with him, that she would speak to him in her own, dear, wonderful way. And kissing her on her sad forehead, and on the sad shamed eyes, and asking her again to take care of herself for his sake.

And then tearing himself away, and going back to London. Not going to London, but being carried along. Finding a grim comfort in being alone, in re-

laxing to misery. Like trying to plan for the funeral of one's loved one, the lists and the programs and the talk that day.

Isabel's child. Blood's.

Plan for their future?

Life, what a hideous thing the four of them had made of it! That custom had made of it.

Alma's child. And now Blood's.

CHAPTER XXXII

A FAREWELL

HE was standing in Fackenthal's private office, by his desk, waiting for his chief to finish signing his name to the sheaf of papers in front of him. The other clerks had gone for the day. This was an appointment, requested by Graeme, by a note, a memorandum laid on Fackenthal's desk the day before, and agreed to by a memorandum he had found on his desk that morning. Until this last minute, he had postponed telling Fackenthal that he was leaving Fackenthal, Knight and Company, leaving England and why; telling him about Isabel.

Fackenthal had glanced up at him when he entered with a brief, friendly greeting: "Any hurry, Wade? Can you wait?" And Graeme had said that there was no hurry.

In a few minutes, Fackenthal pivoted back in his swivel chair. "Now, I'm free. Everything going all right?"

He took a seat by the desk. "I hope you'll think so, sir." He could not tell, from his employer's expression, as he got into his story, what he was making of it. It made the thing harder to tell.

"She is in New York, now?" he was asked.

"She's been there for several months. It's almost her time. I couldn't leave sooner. I should have

been there, but she didn't want me to be—and I had to put by all I could. It may not be easy getting started."

"Why didn't you ask me to help you out, Wade?"

He knew what Fackenthal was thinking. Wouldn't he have been willing to trust an old and tried friend with his confidence if he were fully satisfied with the situation? He was thinking it was the same sort of mess he'd got into before—the same kind of woman. If he could have seen Isabel!

Perhaps he would not have found it so galling, so impossible to borrow from Mr. Fackenthal if it had not been for the history of Wade House. He hadn't *wanted* to own Wade House, else why should he have kept it rented all these years? His own failures, too, had made him sensitive, bad enough to get into a mess like that at the Cape without howling to his friends to come and dig him out.

"I wish you could have seen Isabel," he said stupidly, knowing that it was no answer to Fackenthal's question. Somehow, the older man seemed to think it was.

"How soon are you going?"

He hated to have to tell him that he was going the next day. There had been so many dashed plans, false alarms; so many postponements. Until yesterday, when the last check he'd been waiting a long time for came in, he had not been sure—

"I'm all ready. My passage is booked,"—no need telling him how many steamers had gone without a certain passenger—"my boxes packed. My ship—sails—tomorrow, sir." He caught the hurt look that

swept over the face of his friend. "I can't thank you the way I want for the patience and faith you've given me all these dead dumb years, Mr. Fackenthal."

"Then you're going on, Wade?"

He let his bulldog look answer his employer.

"Then it must be all right—"

"It's all right, sir. There wasn't any other way. Life settles things for one, sometime."

"It's a good thing to be sure that it is life—not one's own temperament. You *think* you must go to a new country, in order to help the woman you love. Can't you help her without sacrificing your career? You are just getting started, you're late getting started. Why not run over and see her, see that she is comfortable, safely settled, and come back? Getting married isn't all there is to life, Wade. I've often wished I could have said this to you at the Cape. The individual life comes first— You wanted to help that other woman, and flung your life away. It doesn't help any one, giving them a sacrificed life—it's perverse of us, but we don't enjoy the people who sacrifice themselves for us."

He knew that Fackenthal would think it was like that other time, at the Cape. That was what made it so hard, telling him. If he'd ever seen Isabel, he'd know how different were the two cases.

"I can't make you believe that it's different, Mr. Fackenthal. I love Isabel. I am proud to love her. That makes the difference—" Could he think he had ever loved Alma?

"I was proud to love your mother, Wade. That's the reason I don't want to see her son make a second

blunder. The first mistake crushed her, Wade. I saw it crush her."

His mother. And Fackenthal. Dub that he was not to have guessed it before. That was why he had never married, his mother was the woman he had told him of. That was why he was so good to him. Loved his mother, had he, the fine, knightly gentleman?

"You seem like my son, Wade. You ought to have been my son. I think she knew, before she died, that she had made a mistake— She never acknowledged it, she thought it was right to keep on— I've been proud of you. I want to keep on being proud of you. I've been afraid that you felt it an ideal to make some woman, some one little family happy. I want you to have a bigger ideal than that—that's part of it—only part of it. I want you to keep on fighting, being a bulldog—letting nothing come in between you and your own—stature. I guess that says it. We don't serve any one by letting our stature get stunted. Now, I have preached to you. What can I do to help?"

"I don't think there's anything else. I've been to the firm's lawyers. If Blood ever sues for a divorce, there'll be some use my getting one— Alma doesn't want it—she doesn't want her father to know, or her friends at the Cape. It's religion with her. Maybe, she doesn't want to marry him now—I fancy he still threatens to tell her people—but he can't get much out of her earnings."

"Your own freedom gave hers to her, you see, Wade," observed Fackenthal.

He looked soberly at his employer. It hadn't struck

him quite that way before. Freed her, setting himself free. Going to think about that later, on the steamer, on the way to New York.

He wasn't going to tell this good friend of his how he was going to New York; steerage. It would hurt him to know how he'd been grinding, saving for Isabel, and giving a pitiful contribution to Alma when he found her stranded, moving to Shoreditch.

"Why doesn't Isabel sue her husband for a divorce, if he's that sort, if she knows he's that sort?" frowned Fackenthal.

"She can't, after what she told him; maybe I didn't tell you what she told him."

"It's his child," stated Fackenthal.

His eyes met the grey, kind eyes steadily. "It's his child."

"I would like you to let me do something, Wade—"

"There is something you can do, sir. If Blood should begin to be ugly, sue, start a scandal, it would be hard working against it, in a new country. I thought I'd start under another name— If you know people over there, letters would help me—"

"Surely letters— But your name—it takes a lifetime to make one name mean something—you're just getting started with Wade Graeme."

He looked helplessly at his friend. "I know. But what else can I do, at first?"

"Will you do me a favour, Wade? Just one. Use my name. As though you were my son. Don't let's talk about it. That's settled. I want to tell you about Wade House."

Wade House, he explained, he had always planned

leaving to Wade, in his will. It was arranged that way. But while Wade was talking, it came to him that he wanted to give it to him, now. A present to Isabel—from Mary Graeme.

The house, he went on to say, was leased now. But the rent would mean something to Wade, while he was getting started. And when they were started right, which meant being able to come back to England, didn't it, there would be Wade House waiting to help him take up the proud old traditions and carry them on.

Rare, splendid Fackenthal! And subtle. Binds him with his name and his present. Knowing he would not bring a woman who was not the right sort into his mother's home, into the Wade traditions; knowing his name, too, was a challenge. Good old careful Fackenthal!

For Mary Graeme's sake he was doing it! Wonderful to have lived a life that goes on living after you yourself are gone. Like a perfume, a life like that, the flower gone, but the perfume filling the room. The fragrance taken up by the walls and the hangings, by the atmosphere. Going on, a life like that. A spirit like Mary Graeme's does not die.

Isabel was like that. He wanted to tell Mr. Fackenthal that Isabel was like that. He would write to him, write him that later; that he would be proud, Fackenthal would, to see Isabel at Wade House, keeping up the Wade traditions, Mary Graeme's life.

"I wish I knew the writing people over there. But Jepson does. Have you seen Jepson?"

"Not yet. I wanted to tell you first, Mr. Facken-

thal. And it's going to be a little awkward, explaining about my name, it's going to be a little awkward explaining it to Mr. Street—he will have forgotten me,—telling him who I am, and then who I'm not! I wonder if you would write to him, explaining?"

"Can't I help you out, how much money do you need?"

As though he were his father, asking him how much money he needed!

"I've got enough." Since last night, at five o'clock, he had enough to make the venture! Enough to see Isabel through. And now, with the rent from Wade House, he could look after her decently, even if it were tedious getting started.

"You could always cable me. You will, Wade? When do I see you again? I've an engagement to-night, I must be starting."

"Tomorrow's Saturday, that's so; I was going out of town. But I'll have those letters for you. Go on fighting. I know you will go on fighting."

"Thank you. Good-bye, Mr. Fackenthal."

He helped his friend into his overcoat. There were no words after that. Two Britishers shaking hands, and smiling; and that chapter was closed, perhaps?

That evening he went to see Jepson. Though the editor promised him all the letters he wanted, himself volunteering to write to Street, recalling Graeme to him, and asking him to take a personal interest in him, still he had carried away a distinctly uncomfortable feeling. Jepson had jumped to an immediate deduction when he told him he was going to use Fackenthal's name over there. He had watched the discovery

come to him; he understood the broader kindliness which had offered to make his path smooth. Jepson thought he was Fackenthal's son.

He wanted to set Jepson straight, but under the circumstances, remembering the story Fackenthal had told him, he didn't know how. He couldn't, could he, without being offensive? Knowing what Jepson was thinking, he couldn't make the eyes steady which had looked back at him. He felt—like Pussy Glasscock!

And he hadn't thought of Pussy Glasscock in twenty years!

Pussy had had more money to spend on himself and his friends than any other boy at Rugby, and he never could look another fellow square in the eyes. Every one knew who his father was, and why it wasn't decent or kind to speak of mothers before Pussy Glasscock. Life wasn't fair to him, it had served him a rotten deal. His fate had given him unstinted money to spend, and the taste to spend it; gave him chances which soured as quickly as milk in hot weather. Lots of good a splendid name does one, if one has to hide forever behind *Glasscock*! He had acquired that shifting glance before he had reached Rugby; the look of one who has been betrayed—

He didn't want to think of Isabel just then. He didn't want *her* face to follow Pussy Glasscock's. He knew quite well why her face pressed in just then. Always back of the sweet thought of her, of Isabel and her books and her roses, were the children that bore a look of her. Children, and a garden, and Isabel; children who would have the shifting glance of a Pussy Glasscock!

Like the trail of a snail, a lie. One can trace the glaze over innocent garden beds. The glaze of Jepson's suspicion crawling over his mother's life. Resenting it! With all his soul resenting it! And thinking helplessly of Isabel, and of a certain home in the north of England.

He had stumbled out, blundering his thanks, saying his good-bye shiftily; had made his way through the fog-obscurd streets; had reached his room in a daze. He was too tired, he told himself, to think anything out. He had been working too hard the past months.

The next day, he found on his desk a message which had been telephoned in from Fackenthal. The letters would be on his desk at four o'clock.

As he sat at his desk, that last morning waiting for the London clocks to end this chapter, to tell him that it was noon, and that he was dropped now from the pendulum, the feeling of nausea seized him. He knew by this time what that sensation threatened. It always came when he'd been over-doing. Working all day and writing all night takes it out of one soon. The ocean trip, he told himself, would buck him up. Ten days on the ocean, and he would be fit to see Isabel.

The London clocks were releasing the London army of clerks. He hadn't told the office he would not be in his place on Monday. They would ask why. So they filed past him, merely nodding, or smiling. One of them, Blackie, turned at the door, and said: "Good hunting."

"Good-bye," he answered.

He spent an hour clearing out his desk. He told

Mumford, the janitor, that he was going on a trip, for Mumford would be gone for the day when he got back from lunch. He wished he could give Mumford something—and then he remembered the rent of Wade House, and went back, and shook hands with him. He felt richer for the eight shillings left behind.

He had planned to take an early train to Liverpool but Fackenthal's message had changed that. He had a few hours to kill, after he had his lunch, and had gathered his handbag from his room which was all ready for the new tenant. Unstrapped boxes were waiting for him to clear out—

He spent the extra hours on the top of 'busses, saying good-bye to London, stately, elegant, indifferent London, who didn't care that he was going, as long as he'd paid his bills.

Cold, often, brutal sometimes, but if one gets on the right side of London, a good old pal. London to him was masculine. Now, Paris, with her jewelled lights and caprices, and her pretty ways, was a woman, nothing masculine about Paris. He wondered what New York would be like.

He said good-bye rather solemnly to the Strand, and to the British Museum as he passed, wondering how long it would be before he passed there again, and how it would be with him. A long time it would be before he looked up at that stately pile. But not so hopeless the up-rooting, since Fackenthal had told him about Wade House, had suggested the carrying on—

.
He was looking through his desk for the letters

Fackenthal had promised him, when the door of the office opened on Fackenthal himself.

"I've just come from Knight's. He's been ill; he sent for me."

"I hope it's not serious."

"He always thinks it's serious, so it's the same thing isn't it?" Fackenthal grinned. "What train are you taking?"

"Oh, any train will do," Graeme answered.

"I've a notion to take the machine, and run out into the country. That brought me back. Will you take a night train?"

He could take a night train!

"We'll come back to the club for dinner, or find it on the road. How soon could you be ready?"

Graeme thought he could be ready almost anytime. It wasn't necessary to say how long he had been ready!

A half hour later he was sitting by the side of Fackenthal, being carried past the places to which an hour or so before he had been bidding a dramatic farewell. How long would it be, he had asked the solemn face of the British Museum, before he was looking at her again? She must have had her tongue in her cheek.

There was no sun; the fog drifting down upon them gave the feeling of winter. Graeme put on his coat, as Fackenthal drew shut one of the windows.

Suddenly, Fackenthal called: "Holden! Drive back a bit, slowly, I want to see if that gate is locked. There's a place I'd like to show you, Wade, a garden I've always fancied. Some one's living in it, now, but

I think it could be bought. The next gate, Holden."

"It's open, shall we drive through?" asked the man.

"Yes, slowly. It's a poet's garden, Wade. Peaceful, and sweet. I've been thinking that this is where I'd like to spend my last chapter, dreaming, remembering—"

"A long time off, sir," returned Graeme, affectionately. Then: "I've often thought that it would be Wade House."

Fackenthal dismissed that suggestion. Wade House was for the son of Mary Graeme.

Fackenthal recalled to Holden a little inn in a suburban town not far off, he thought. Where there was a rose-arbour, and an old-fashioned garden, with a big fireplace in the ancient house quite large enough for a family of old-fashioned size to enjoy together. The garden, he told Wade, reminded him of Italy, but the house was England, England of yesterday, of chaises and relays and merry-drinking travellers. The old walls, he thought, could tell many a story. It was too late, probably, for the roses, but they could dine in the garden, and if Holden hurried, could watch the sun go down between the ancient trees.

Evening ran towards them suddenly. The sun was setting when they reached a rambling settlement of small houses and modest garden plots. The up-curling smoke told of meals being prepared; of home-comings. The absence of railroad tracks and station suggested completeness and isolation, self-satisfaction. It recalled Annersley to Graeme, Isabel's Annersley, and prompted him to ask Mr. Fackenthal a favour, about Wade House.

He began to tell him of Annersley, of some of the things Isabel had told him, of her girlhood, her fright, her loneliness. He was interrupted by their arrival at the inn.

The middle-aged innkeeper wondered if the gentlemen would not find it too cold, eating in the garden after the sun had gone down?

Fackenthal insisted that Wade should eat his dinner under the old appletree. He wanted him to carry with him to the new world that little memory of old England. They had their heavy coats, if the wind should come up. They stretched themselves in the rustic armchairs.

"She must be a sweet woman," Fackenthal picked up the thread where it had been dropped.

"She is like my mother, not in looks, but her way, with life, with people," responded Wade. "I wonder if I might ask you, sir—one must always think of the chances of being snuffed out,—if I should be run over by an automobile, or should go down with my ship,—Wade House, if you have made it mine, would go to Alma. I don't like to think of that, that brute making her sell it, to any one, in a hurry. And I could not will it to Isabel. Alma would make trouble about that."

Of course, there would be trouble with Alma, Fackenthal gravely agreed. He had not thought about that. He remembered one little transaction, when she had sold him the furnishings,—he wondered if Wade knew about that.

He had not known.

An overwhelming realization of Mr. Fackenthal's

generosity mingled with a swift impression of Wade House, as it was, as he had not known it was still—with its oak panelled hall, its living-room of gracious dimensions and dignified old furniture that had belonged to many a generation of Wades, old pieces of walnut and mahogany. He could see a woman's form coming through the French windows from the lawn, followed by his dogs—not his mother, for the first time not seeing his mother there, but Isabel!

He put his hand quietly on that of his friend.

Later, he said: "But you could leave it to *her*, Mr. Fackenthal! To Isabel. Alma would have no grounds to combat that. Isabel is using her mother's name, Sorbier. Did I tell you that before?"

Fackenthal took his notebook.

"I won't give time any chance to play that kind of a trick on us my boy. I will attend to that tomorrow!"

He spoke of it again, when Wade was boarding his train at Euston.

Newsies were making an unholy racket when the two men reached again the city streets. Somebody was murdered. Huxtry! Huxtry! Somebody was killed!

Fackenthal had Holden stop and buy a paper. "Archduke Ferdinand," said Fackenthal, reading the *Globe*. "Murdered at Saravejo."

"Archdukes just folks, these days," commented Graeme. "It doesn't mean more than a holiday to his nation, and a ripping harvest for the newsies."

Fackenthal was deeply absorbed in the report.

"Europe's like a laid fire," he said, folding the sheet. "A spark would set her off."

Newsies were racketing at the station. Over the death of a mere archduke! As if it mattered to self-centred London!

Euston Station recalled Liverpool, and Isabel. Going to Liverpool again, without Isabel.

The whistles blew, bells were ringing. Fackenthal, who had bought a ticket for the next station in order to go through the gate with him, stepped back from the train. Graeme hung out of the window, waving to the erect, silver-topped man who was standing watching him, smiling, smiling—

“Huxtry! Huxtry!” shrilled the voices of England’s boys.

Saying good-bye to England!

CHAPTER XXXIII

TRAVELLERS OF HOPE

HAD he gone on board his ship earlier, he would have changed his ticket, or waited for the next boat. No one had ever told him that a steerage was—a pen, a pen was what it was! One bewildered survey of the long rows of bunks which were supported by the pipes or tubes of iron that grid-ironed the ward, had sent him scurrying to find an official who could locate his boxes, and let him off the ship, if they couldn't fix him up on the next deck. By the time he could find any one with leisure to listen to a steerage complaint, the ship was swinging out of the harbour. Several hours later, he was informed that there was not an empty berth on the vessel. He resigned himself to ten days of horror.

The horror unfolded rapidly; the first day at sea was a blur of wretchedness. The first night he spent in his hard bunk. The night was a daze of nausea, of frightful stench, of wailing infants and cursing men.

At dawn, he dragged himself into the room labelled: "Men's Washing-room," and found it pre-empted by mothers and babies. His toilet that day went no farther than a toothbrushing. He fled from the cries and the stench, and the clatter of foreign words.

He told himself that he would not go back to that hole. On deck he found a pile of ropes on which he

flung himself, feeling green about the lips, and abandoned himself to hours of conscious misery.

The air, he told himself, at any rate was pure, though too cold for comfort. At least, he could breathe. There was no chance of sleeping, of course, for the women were flocking on deck, chattering like crows, the babies screaming.

It surprised himself to find that he could deaden his ears to them, that he could achieve a partial unconsciousness. So exhausted from the misery of the night before, so wearied by the strain of the last weeks in London, that in spite of the cold wind, of the drifting fog which settled on his hair and his clothes like a bright frost, he found himself relaxing—dreamily aware that the women were sitting near his head, that the children were playing at his feet; as from a distance, he heard them babbling in a strange gibberish.

It was like falling towards a beautiful death. It was like falling into a pool of clean, clear water, this swift surrender to sleep and to the fresh bath of ocean air.

He dreamed of the awful cave, with its metal posts supporting the rows of disgusting beds. He would wake, shivering, as he thought from the fetid air, to find himself chilled, his clothes damp, the clear, sharp breezes blowing over his head, the strange, guttural sounds clacking over his head. And would drop to sleep again. Once, waking, he found a strange, new and friendly sun drying his clothes, and slipped off to sleep once more.

He slept through the second day at sea, with these snatches of consciousness, and on into the twilight.

When he roused for the first time fully, the stars were coming out to prick a deep blue sky. Children were rolling about a disordered deck, and encroaching on his pile of ropes. A babel of tongues, French, German, Italian, Slavic, rumbled and shrilled near him. Infants were crying unnoticed.

Managing to make a woman understand that he wanted her to save his ropes for him, he made a swift descent into the fetid cave. He came back, at once, feeling pallid, bearing some blankets and another coat. The price of the dive into the cabin was a shivering attack of nausea— He decided that he would have to lie awake all night, that he had forfeited the right to sleep after that orgy of unconsciousness, and the sun wakened him the next morning.

A roll of newspapers was still serving him as a pillow; his hat was crushed over his eyes, every muscle ached. But his coat and blankets had kept him warm. He had not stirred during the night.

He got to his feet, and stretched. It took courage to go in search of coffee. He was soon back on deck again. That afternoon, after his first meal, he began to take stock of his fellow passengers, to realize the vaulting sky and the limitless ocean. To discover pleasure in living was like discovering life, like being born consciously anew.

If it weren't for the necessity of entering the foul cave, he would be glad that his poverty had made him ship steerage. Unnecessary discomfort it had proved, on account of Fackenthal's gift. The rent of Wade House, coming every six months, would make him independent. He would never consent to do it again,

so this was his chance to enjoy it, the chance to see at first hand the people who are making America. These neighbours of his were the folk who were creating the problem of amalgamation. Before mine barons caught them, or pork barons caught them, or steel barons caught them, they were travellers of hope!

He debated, watching the faces of the Slavic and Celtic women, of the two views of the new world peopling. Was it the failures, the inefficients of Europe who were settling America? That was Fiske's warning to the new world. But it wasn't, he knew, the popular theory in the United States!

From Street, he knew that Americans glorified in their belief that courage is the contribution of the immigrant to the new world; that it is the heritage of the children of America; the bequest of red-blooded men who had been founding it anew each day since those of the colonies. It stirred his imagination, that belief. He preferred, for his part, not to have too bright a spotlight thrown on the histories of the first comers. He liked, moreover, to think of his fellow passengers as adventurers, modern Christophers, their courage none the less dauntless because their entire fortune was bound up in that blue or scarlet handkerchief! He chose to think that they had not left the contented, successful comrades at home; their associates who lacked the courage to come with them were the submerged tenth of the city masses, of Berlin, Vienna, Prague, Buda-Pesth.

Does it require courage for the uprooting? Did he not know? He looked with respect at the rough men and women who refused to be submerged, to

have their children exposed to the risk of the submerging. When he felt less dragged, he was going to mix with these people. He had learned to mix with people like this in London, in those backroom gatherings, in the basement meetings, or digging cellars that women might make themselves into *objets d'art*.

To a Sicilian woman he offered his overcoat for a pillow and his pre-empted pile of ropes, adding his pile of newspapers for a pillow. For she looked exhausted. She established herself and her infant volubly, but her smile and her gestures alone were comprehensible.

Graeme knew no Italian, save a few musical phrases, and a few words to be recognized as cousins to French, Latin. For a few minutes he gesticulated with the Sicilian, and turned for sociability to a group of Germans. He found them ready to meet him nearer than halfway. They plied him with all sorts of questions; where he came from, and where he was going? Why was he going there; had he ever been there before, and if he were going to return, by and by? Was he married, and where, then, was his wife? And where had he bought his clothes, his practical clothes, and his most practical shoes, and how much had they cost? And did he think that the Archduke's death would bring trouble?

Their uncurbed, naïve curiosity amused him for awhile, for he had forgotten this characteristic of theirs. But he wearied, at length, of explaining himself. He had got nothing from them. They

shrugged and smiled, and said "Ach, Gott!" when he asked them why *they* were here.

He discovered a Serb on his way to Pittsburg who could speak a picturesque English. Not an intellectual treasure, in himself, but he might unlock the doors to the treasure. He was willing to act as interpreter for the Slavs who were herded together. Graeme felt at length as though he were German, the kind of German who is away from home for the first time, and to whom all things are strange. He did not want to know the price of their strange, common clothes, but he yearned to know their personal story; why they were leaving safety, if it were safety, to dare the dangers of the unknown? Hope, how much they hoped! A line of Le Gallienne's kept recurring to him: "She expected too much of life to be comfortable to live with." Did not all of these people expect too much to be quite comfortable to live with? They were on their way, they believed, to the land of promise, and of fulfilment. Their visions held no fears of robber barons, or steel or pork barons, of lynchings, mobs, grafters, padrones. No country could stand the test of their belief, and their disillusionment.

Hereafter, the word Pittsburg would return the picture of the Serb making of his middleman position a distinguished one. He would see the wind blowing the women's shawls into balloons, twisting their hair into streamers. He would see the black-eyed Slovak with his family of ten, all black-eyed, and as vivid of face as himself, the father. He was on his way to

wrest a living from a steel baron, who would not care whether he earned a living or not. He would be just a "hand," to keep a furnace going until another traveller of hope took his place.

The word Chicago would recall a group of hungry-eyed Columbuses, from Genoa, from Naples, on their way to the jungles. Milwaukee would remind him of the people who liked his practical clothes. Travelers of hope!

After the first few minutes of consciousness, they forgot that the Slav was passing on their confidences to the silent Englishman. And their stories began to flow. Vital stuff, all of it. One word began to ring through his brain, it was like a refrain, the word *freedom*. That was the reason they were adventurers, religious freedom, political freedom, broader laws—education, children's freedom. That was the foundation of the new world.

Two women of the Slav group were approaching their hour. Their condition was a constant reminder of Isabel. When he thought of her that way, she was no longer his Isabel. She belonged to that child, to that other man's child. The child was pushing him away from her.

Not in affection, in admiration. It hadn't changed his love for her, but he could no longer think of her in the old, sweet, wonderful way. He couldn't summon her to himself any more, telling him about her roses, about Annersley. He discovered that he was hoping the child would die.

Try as he would, he could not plan their life, the three of them, Isabel, himself, and the child who

would be a continual reminder of the life they were trying to forget. Outlaws, they would be, Fiske's outlaws, fleeing for a place to hide in!

He kept thinking of Jepson's face when the fancied discovery had been made; and then of Pussy Glasscock. Of Jepson, of Pussy Glasscock, of Isabel, as the Serb kept up his interminable translating. If the story followed them or came out, if Blood's belief followed them, that child would look like Pussy Glasscock—would look as though it had been betrayed—would believe itself the child of Isabel and Wade Graeme. The way *their* own children would look. There would never be any children of Isabel and Wade Graeme. That he pledged, as though in court, in church, to his God. His God!

He saw himself back in the Bond Street cellars. A rough Irishman said it, the words which had given him such a jolt, given him the feeling that it was time to wake up, and stop the business of sleeping and unreal dreams. "He was never going to drink again, as sure as God is Goodness."

Strange, what a chance phrase can do to one. It had rung in his brain for days. As sure as God is *Goodness*.

Years of straining after faith, years of trying to force his spirit to his knees, and there the light had burst on him as it had come to Paul on his way to Damascus. God is Goodness.

It is our man-made words that betray us! We make a word to describe a fact, and then it becomes a prison for our children. The dictionaries are full of those prisons. He had looked the word God up

in the dictionary at the office in Fetter Lane. "A supreme being, self-existent and eternal." The man from Cork had said it better: God is Goodness.

Trying to teach faith to the children, we give them facts, foundations of facts; we make stout walls of definitions; buttress the solemn building with stern timbers of law; add a few flying buttresses of symbols. We take the child to pray in this Gothic place. And then he goes on without us into more prosaic buildings, where he is told that his bricks were false; the foundation untrustworthy; told that they were not facts, but hope.

Surely, the Mary mothers knew it right, and the pastor fathers, that God is Goodness, leading us on, and up, that it is the spirit, or mystery, of goodness, of progress, feeling its way steadily to the light. But they had given him a definition from a dictionary.

As sure as God is Goodness. Strange place to find faith, in a Bond Street cellar!

The Serb was still talking, translating more stories, of quests for freedom. This was a Slav woman, one he had been watching. She trailed a piteous child that reminded him of little Alma. It had the face of age, the mind of infancy. Ten years old, the Serb told him.

With her were six other children. They were on their way to find the husband and father who had dropped out of sight in the new country. Until a year ago, he had written, and had sent money. Since then, there was only silence. She had put by, the Serb explained to Graeme, a little money, and had borrowed the rest from the village priest. Without

a word of the new language, she had started for America.

That night, towards morning, Graeme was wakened from his deep sleep on his pile of ropes by some one tripping over his feet. He heard a smothered curse—two sailors were carrying a ghastly looking bundle, wrapped in blankets. Over the shipside, they dropped it.

He did not get asleep again. On a ship, he thought, that is all it means, a soul's passing. The next morning, no one knows anything about it.

He found his blankets were soaking. A heavy fog had caught them, or was this a rain that was falling? He shuddered at the thought of his berth in the steerage cabin. He was awake when the ship struck.

They had been going slowly, signals sounding every few seconds, but at once, the engines were stopped; and slowly, the great ship was halted. Lights flashed out over the boat, men and women came running out of the cabins, chattering, crying. There was no one who seemed to know anything, what they had struck, or why they had stopped. For a half hour, they lay drifting, in mid-ocean. And then slowly, they began to move on again.

The Serb told Graeme that one of the officers had informed him that the other ship had glanced across their prow. That no damage had been done. Within an hour after Graeme had been wakened by the sailor tripping over his feet, he was once more alone on deck, lying on his pile of ropes, with the sound of the engines in his ears.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THROUGH THE FOG

MIDNIGHT and mid-ocean; a blur of dim light staining the fog where the moon is trying to push her way through. Darkness on deck, and the fog-signal's, low booming, as the ship ploughs slowly her way through the black waters. Now that the danger's over, nobody caring to share with him the wave-swept deck where death had stalked a few minutes ago. Gone, the frightened rabbits, to finish out their dreams of freedom, of plenty, of mates and young, leaving it to the captain to push them safely through the fog.

'The fog so thick that the other ship was on them before they saw it. Straining, he could now barely see the black water slapping against the side of the ship. If an iceberg were jutting up in their path, they wouldn't see it until they struck—

It made him think of London, this heavy, impenetrable fog, the fog of the London streets; head down, counting the number of steps to his door, for fear he might stumble into the wrong house—hold on, Wade Graeme! *That's* the thought you promised yourself, back there, that you'd thrash out on the steamer, when you were face to face, alone with yourself. Alone with yourself this minute, midnight

and mid-ocean, alone on deck. Not since the nights of the Karroo alone like this with your own soul!

Haven't you the trick of stumbling into the wrong house? Pushing blindly into a new country, leaving the place of home and friends, and opportunity, why? Because mud will be flung at you, and you don't like mud, or you don't like it for the woman you're going to take care of. Isn't America the wrong house for you, Wade Graeme? Going proudly, courageously, or as an outlaw, to the new world, one of Fiske's outlaws! Ever going to get into the right house, Wade Graeme?

Freedom, he would like to assert, was directing him? Doesn't life, demands self-defence, owe at least that much to a man,—the woman he wants to be with, children that look like her, like himself— That isn't all of life, though, the nest, and being glad and snug in it. There's a man's stature, as Fackenthal said. Which means sending one's roots into the earth; growing tall and straight; if one is English, that means English soil, means carrying on.

Not lying, like ostriches, Street's ostriches—pretending not to hear, not to see—

It was about here, he thought, where the great ship went down in the darkness, time back; close now to the place where panic turned men into white-livered rabbits, men whose sense of values was untrained. All that they knew was the ego of the safe skin. They hadn't been taught the relation of the I to every other I.

"A chance," thought those men in a hurry, "a chance

for some one in those lifeboats. Why not *my* chance? Those other people don't want to live as much as I do; they haven't so much to live for; haven't therefore as much right to live."

If one can call it living, after. When men look askance at one because he took the chance of the lifeboats, a white-livered rabbit; call that *living*?

It's no worse, what they did, than what men are doing every day in the Cities. *Their* chance to get all the wheat; their chance to get all the cotton. No worse, only more conspicuous. Those basement fellows know what they are talking about! They say every soul has a right to live, a right to air and water, and knowledge, and decent food, and clothes; to Love. An honest right.

Then what's the test, whether it's freedom or outlawry?

If a man's solution can't be applied by all men without carrying wholesale misery, then he is cornering happiness, isn't he, as those other men corner wheat? Who said that? Anyway, it was the test.

The fog at last lifting.

At the expense then of the rest, looking at it that way. Not a nice thought to live with, to spend one's life with. If one wants to be a hermit, in a mob or in a mountain, the rabbit creed is the one to take. What does one want, then, the most to have? Food? Money? Grab it. Life? A cushioned chance, or a desperate one in a lifeboat, corner it then, quick to the lifeboat with one's precious white liver that it may go on living, no, *livering's* the right verb for white livers!

Then what was he going to do? Where was he going?

How did he know? How does a man know today what he will do tomorrow? The big thing is knowing about it, facing it, telling the truth about it to one's own soul. Telling the truth as it changes.

For it's always changing, adjusting, this matter of living. A series of expanding relationships, somebody said; of conflicting relationships, he would say, of opposing duties that grind a man's soul between. First, the right to be an I. The right to keep a light burning at that altar where no one else enters. Then the Family. That can be as rotten selfish as the I if one doesn't think straight and clear about it. A nest, it is; it wasn't meant to be a cage. The world's now in the Family stage, talking about how holy it is, and forgetting how many it shuts out of holiness; peering over the edge of the nest once in a while, the world is, at the larger groups growing.

Beginning to understand, the world is, that the family must serve the larger groups; like the unselfish outpouring one sees in wartime, when a nation is in danger. And a nation is always in danger. Those socialist fellows see it. They try to point out our hypocrisies to us, and we call *them* names. They tell us the truth about things, and we cross ourselves as though the devil had stepped on our altars.

"We make too much of it, the nest," they say, "or too little of it. We get too snug and selfish in it," or too warped and soured in it! We stand too close to it. Stand too close to a man's hat, and it shuts out the entire procession.

He could see Jepson, that minute, Jepson sitting in his booklined office, Jepson playing with the string of his monocle. "Get too close to the flag, and you can't see the rest of the map."

He's right, too. As the I can be a prison, so can the Family, and so, unless it's used right, so can nationality. These the steps by which races climb. Jepson thinks we are getting ready for the next step, internationality.

We're still in the Family stage, nursing our white livers!

.

Soon the night would be passing, the deck would be filling up with clattering voices, the strange vigil over. His companions would look at him, and think they saw the same Wade Graeme. Was Abraham the same after he had talked with the angels, or Samuel after he had talked with God? Himself never the same again, after looking life and death square in the face, measuring life by death and eternity.

Perhaps many men have solemn moments like that, when they stand stripped of the bitter and the sweet, a naked soul, staring death, and life, in the eye. That old college play of the summons when one by one the man's desires were dropped, and at the last, his lute! Every soldier in battle has it, every woman who meets her hour of travail, all who in strength face death must have that rummy, silent moment when there is no relationship to anything a man can feel or see or hear. Alone, calling out to God, somewhere—

.

One's ship ploughing on in the darkness, the mist in

one's face. Alone; the way one came; the way one goes out. A blur of light telling one that the moon is shining somewhere, a gleam from the bridge where the captain is watching—

How can one be sure that the captain is watching, that he hasn't fallen asleep up there? That the ship isn't blindly plunging through the fog?

That's the other relation. Belief in a meaning, in a conscious purpose, in a captain who is pushing the ship through the fog.

And dawn breaking—

CHAPTER XXXV

CATTLE

THE Serbian called his attention to the precautions which were being taken with the steerage passengers. They were being carefully watched and segregated. He wondered if this were the usual procedure with immigrant ships nearing port. A rumour started somewhere that there was serious illness aboard. He remembered the sinister burden jettisoned by the sailors the night the two ships had struck. He spoke to the Serbian about it.

The ship officers were unwilling to talk, but precautions were continued to be taken. The rumours grew. Every group was whispering of the suspected sickness, and fearing Ellis Island.

It was a shock to Graeme to learn that they were doubtless to be held in quarantine. Isabel needing him, and himself fuming at Ellis Island!

He had exhausted his human quarry. The immigrants were buzzing about their disappointments, of the friends who were waiting for them; they were no longer interesting, and the Serbian himself was morose. He no longer wanted to talk of the political hopes of his people, nor of the Archduke, of the Saravejo affair. Graeme got out his books, and tried to write.

It seemed endless the waiting for the verdict—in sight of land, and not able to know how it was with

her. She had three weeks yet to go,—he had allowed himself that much margin, still things might go wrong— His impatience accused the officials because the steerage people were kept so long in suspense. On the upper deck, careless faced people were playing games and dancing—no suspense there, it was easy to see. They had been told whether they were to be allowed to land, or not. People down here are supposed not to care; makes no difference to cattle whether they are landed two weeks late or not.

Striding up and down the deck, striding to keep from jumping overboard. Children under his feet, anxious, shawled women getting in his path, trying to make him understand their questions. Then hanging over the shipside, watching the forest of buildings. Somewhere behind that jagged skyline, his Isabel was watching for him.

It was going to be Ellis Island.

And Isabel waiting!

Tramping the deck, interminably tramping. Hard to keep from stepping on the miserable little steerage brats. Hard to keep from thinking of the things that could happen—

He saw the excitement on the upper decks when the first mail was distributed. They had their mail first, because they were on the upper decks, because they had enough money to be on the upper decks. By his side, was the Slavic woman, in a torment of despair for one letter, and nobody paying the least attention to her distress. She wasn't supposed to have the same feelings. It isn't so important for a mother with six children to know if any one in the new country is going to

meet her, see that she is not stranded, as it is for oriented Americans to know the latest figures of steel and oil and cotton—

He watched the little woman telling her story to every one who would listen to her gibberish. The child wailing by his side, the one his boot had missed by an inch, was her child. Poor little superfluous! Not its fault that one shrinks from its aged face! He went back and picked it up in his arms and went on pacing the deck, thinking of little Alma, and of Isabel, of Blood's child.

He saw a crowd collecting in one corner of the deck, and a line forming. Letters? 'The child was deposited in a corner, where it resumed its wailing. Graeme fell into line.

After a long wait, he saw the Slavic woman returning with empty hands. Tears were coursing down her lined face. Then he saw the Serbian, whose hands were full of letters.

He braced himself to be told that there was nothing for a man named Wade Fackenthal. Two envelopes were handed him, a letter, and a telegram, both from New York.

The yellow envelope made his heart leap. The letter bore a strange handwriting. If she were not ill, if she were well enough to write, there would have been a letter in her own dear writing. He hunted a corner to read his messages; his pile of ropes was deserted. He sank down, staring miserably at the envelopes—slowly tearing them open.

The telegram said: "Mrs. Sorbier at the River

Hospital. Is improving. Received your cable, stating arrival. See letter." Signed "Mary Paul."

The dictated letter read: "Dearest Wade. They say I am going to get well. For awhile it seemed as though I might not be here to welcome you. So don't be shocked when you see me. I understand about the name, if you think that's best. Make haste, and don't worry. Isabel."

Just like her, that letter. Tells him the truth about herself, so that he won't be shocked at her appearance, and adds: Don't worry!

Later, he remembered that neither the letter nor telegram had mentioned the child. He reread them, searching for a significance he might have missed.

That again, was like Isabel. She could not send him a mocking assurance that the child was flourishing. Not for him the sort of message happier-starred men receive: "Mother and child are both doing well." The sort of men who do not blunder their lives away—

He despatched a telegram at once, telling her that he was again outside her door, but it wasn't on the latch, the New York door wasn't. He told her that they were being held at Ellis Island on suspicion, that as far as he could find out, nobody now was ill. He did not tell her of the one that had been dumped overboard. "Suspicion" was enough; it told the story.

Here they were, a ship load of men and women fretting because they were not allowed to land at once, thinking it terribly inconsiderate of regulations, or of the wretch who would die and hold them up like this. And that wretch dropped back there, never going to

get to New York, to his plans, to his friends. Some one waiting for him, too, some Isabel. Selfish brutes crowds make us into!

Isabel was getting well. What did anything else matter, if Isabel were getting well?

He could not write. His books could not hold his attention. He began to teach the little Slavic woman a few English words; the lessons grew to absorb the greater part of the day. It was the only thing he could do for her, except to give her his address, care of Isabel's lodgings, and tell her to look him up if she did not find her husband.

The meal time grew to be a lesson. Soon she was able to say that she wanted "bread," "fresh bread," so that one could understand her; and then "milk" and "meat," pointing them out as she lisped the words; and then "fork and knife," and then: "I am alone, I am looking for my husband; or "I need a doctor." He had taught her to say *tram* when he remembered, and had to give that lesson over again. He was beginning to teach her to say: "Where is the apothecary shop?" when he remembered a letter from Isabel: "They say 'drug-store' in New York, Wade!" and taught her good American.

It was slow, tedious work, helping the Slav to arm herself against the dangers of a strange city. But it killed time for him. When the fourteen days were over, he rejoiced that he had not known how long it was going to be.

Even when they were slowly steaming into port, patience, he knew was yet needed. Customs officers

were yet to be met and appeased; the immigrants had to be examined—

He watched the upper deck people landing as he stood by the side of the Slavic woman, waiting.

Isabel in a little white bed, waiting, her eyes on the door!

At last, they were going to let the cattle land!

He was entering New York, the land of equality. As cattle. He wanted to laugh aloud. It was so absurd that any one pretended to believe the fiction that there is equality anywhere—

Not even equal chances. More chances, that is all.

He told the customs official that he would leave his boxes there, and come back and declare later. It was important that he go at once.

He was in a rage because they told him he had to declare before he left. They couldn't wait two hours for him, when they had kept him fourteen days?

Her eyes on the door, waiting, while he stands in a line to show his miserable boxes!

Two dollars—how many shillings? Why, he'd give a hundred shillings to get out of here!

"Sorry, you didn't tell me that before, sir. I might have accommodated you!" twinkled the braided official.

Graeme stared. He had said "sir," to one from the steerage. His anger fell from him. One can be a gentleman, and travel steerage?

"Thank *you*, sir!" he threw back at the examiner, and then ran towards freedom. At last—Isabel!

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE NEW WORLD

GRAEME planned to leave the finding of quarters until after seeing Isabel. He had his boxes thrown in the taxi, and in front with the chauffeur who told him that it was a long "ways" to the River Hospital.

He paid with demur his astonishing bill, and was turning towards the hospital steps when the chauffeur reminded him of his luggage.

Graeme eyed him aghast. He had forgotten his baggage. He wanted to drop it in the street. It had wasted too much time already. Take it into the hospital with him? He caught the grin on the fellow's face: a maternity hospital. Make the man wait, and that ghastly meter ticking its head off?

"I say, I was a duffer," he began, thinking aloud.

"Going to be here long?" inquired the chauffeur, still smiling.

"With that clock ticking away my entire fortune? Isn't there a hotel near by? Any kind of a house?"

"Right across the street, on the corner. A first-class place."

"That, then," he said, climbing into the taxi.

When they drew up in front of the hotel, some thirty seconds later, Graeme asked, as he paid the toll, if he would take the boxes into the hotel?

"Not farther than the sidewalk; there's a union rule."

It was fully ten minutes before Graeme was again on his way to the hospital, possessor of a room in the new country.

As he walked up the stone steps of the hospital, his limbs were trembling. His teeth were pressing against his lower lip. He told himself that the voice was rotten which asked for Mrs. Isabel Sorbier.

The superior young woman in the office displayed pride in her ignorance of Mrs. Sorbier. What floor was she on?

Graeme murmured that that was what he wanted her to tell him. The marcelled head turned towards the telephone. She directed him, without turning again in his direction: "Take the elevator. She's on the fifth floor. Inquire at the office."

At the fifth floor, he was disgorged, but there was no one in sight to show him the room he sought. He stood waiting, feeling curiously helpless. A few minutes later he saw a blue-gowned, white-capped girl some distance down the hall, bearing fresh linen in her hands. He ran after her, as she disappeared down a side hall. "Can you tell me where the office is?"

She herself was on her way there. But who did he want to see? Mrs. Sorbier? Dr. Wood's patient. "His name is on the door. This corridor, at the end."

He noticed that she looked curiously after him as he went into the office. Seemed surprised that he wanted to see Mrs. Sorbier. He was Isabel's first visitor, probably. Poor, lonely little Isabel!

He was told that he could see Mrs. Sorbier, for a

few minutes, they added, at the office. She was still very ill; he would not let her talk?

He was shaking like an aspen by this time. He was glad to have the friendly nurse lead him—he was trying to pull himself together. The nurse pushed the door open, and following her, Wade saw her eyes, watching, waiting!

Not even her warning, or the words of the nurses in the office had prepared him for this. Can any one looking like that ever creep back to life? Nothing left of his Isabel but her eyes!

"Wade!" she whispered. "Wade!"

He was afraid to touch her. The hand resting on the bed looked like a claw. He patted it carefully, kissing her lightly on her soft hair.

"Wade!" whispered Isabel again. "Wade!"

The nurse entered; to see that he did not excite her patient? Was she as low as that? Not dying? She wasn't dying? He looked at the nurse.

A calm, capable young woman answered him. "Getting better, slowly, Mr. Fackenthal. I sent you the messages. I hope you have not been worrying?" She was holding her patient's wrist.

"You must remember your promise, Mrs. Sorbier. If you can't do better than this, I shall have to send Mr. Fackenthal away."

"Should I go?" demanded Graeme.

"A few minutes longer. It will be better, if you can arrange it, to give her several short visits a day, until she is stronger, staying just a few minutes at a time? Everything now exhausts her. I shall come back in two minutes, Mrs. Sorbier! Will you ring if

you want me?" Her question was directed at Graeme.

When the door shut behind her, Wade leaned over the pillow. "Darling!" he whispered. "My darling! Can't you smile at me?"

But he could not summon the old glad light to her eyes. She was coming back to him very slowly, but coming back, thank God!

"Sit down," she bade him.

He tried to make the glance casual which he sent around the room when he secured his chair. He was remembering the child. He promised himself to ask the nurse at the office about the baby—

Miss Paul was back, almost immediately it seemed to him, with a foamy drink for her patient. She bestirred herself over Isabel whose eyes had closed. Graeme thought she had fallen asleep.

He was alarmed because the nurse could not arouse her.

"Is she often like this? Has my visit been too much for her?"

"She's been under a strain, waiting for you. She's had a hard time pulling through, Mr.—Fackenthal."

After he left the hospital, her hesitation recurred to him. His cable to Isabel had told more than one person that he was not going to use his own name in the new country. But he did not think of it then. He wanted to be sure that she knew where he was staying, where a message could summon him. At the Pilgrim's Hotel, across the street? Was there nothing he could get for her?

"Strength!" shrugged the nurse.

When he was descending the outer steps of the hos-

pital, he remembered his intention to ask after the child. He would ask at the office when he returned, he resolved. Or if Isabel were asleep, he would ask Miss Paul.

On the street, boys were selling extras. One would think the whole world were ablaze, the way they screamed, the New York newsies! He beckoned one of them, buying his first American paper, while crossing the street to the Pilgrim's Hotel. Duffer, not to have asked for one on the steamer. Doubtless all the upper deck people had been reading their papers for two weeks. Down there with those foreigners, he had taken on their habits.

Screaming headlines told him, as he walked into the lobby of the hotel, glancing at first carelessly at the sheet, that Austria had delivered her ultimatum to Serbia.

"Ultimatum? What for?" he wondered. And then he recalled the death of the Archduke Ferdinand. Anything to do with that? Surely, they were not still talking about that? All the time he was on the ocean, and marooned on Ellis Island, they were raging away over that? There wouldn't be any real trouble. One of them would back down. That had happened twice the past five years, nations getting to the edge of war, and backing down. Nations today don't want—their people don't want war.

Still, there were Germany's war-lords—waiting, and ready with their blood-hounds.

The Balkans, a brush heap as the Serbian had said, which a match could set aflame.

It wasn't going to happen. The other nations

wouldn't let it happen. They would step in and interfere.

Nothing so bad as the fear which had chilled him an instant back, the fear of a general war. But how under heaven could that be prevented, if Austria and Serbia fall to blows? Russia could not let Serbia, plucky little Serbia, just daring to dream of freedom, be wiped off the map. If Russia should come in, that would drag in Germany, at once would drag in Germany. Why, Austria's ultimatum meant Germany! Would Germany let the dreadful sleeping giant attain his full strength, at her own back door? And that would drag in France. France was always sleeping with one eye open, anyway, having to watch her uncomfortable neighbour who insists upon carrying a loaded gun. If Germany comes in, it would mean England, too.

England!

Why, it would be the war Europe has been prattling about over her teacups for so long. Armageddon. If Austria really declares war. Over an archduke! The match for the brush heap!

He must look up the back papers, at once; must see the English papers, and find out what England is saying; what led up to this. He wanted to read the *Globe*.

At the hotel desk, a little nervous Frenchman was standing, talking, gesticulating while the clerk was getting his mail from his pigeonhole. The head clerk listened to him politely before turning to ask Graeme what he wanted.

The Frenchman was interested by the request for

the back papers. He had a file of them, he volunteered, upstairs, in his room. If the stranger wished to see them, if he would save them, he was most welcome. The gentleman's number was—585? Good. He would see that he got them at once. Of course, he wanted to read about the Serbian complication?

"It's too absurd," repeated Graeme, as though to reassure himself. But it did not reassure him. He thought of England, playing golf— And of Germany, with her hordes of trained soldiers—

They lingered in the lobby for a few minutes, talking about Austria. It was a relief to have some one to talk with, some one who was also apprehensive. Graeme asked the Frenchman if he did not think it a bluff with Austria? Hers was a large army, but unseasoned, and look at Serbia's war-toughened men!

"But you have to remember," urged the Frenchman, uneasily, "that Austria knows she must do something to keep the nation from falling to pieces. She is all ready to fall to pieces. War, with Germany to back her, must seem safer than that."

"You believe there's going to be war!" exclaimed Graeme.

"I think it's been settled a long time, all but the excuse, the reason," frowned the little Frenchman. "And between Austria and Germany all arranged for the last few weeks. Now, we are being let into *le grand secret*. England is supposed to be what you call preoccupied?"

"If Serbia stands out," began Graeme, and broke off. It couldn't happen. Unthinkable, a flareup like that. Modern, conservative Europe blazing! He

tried to visualize stately, frockcoated London in a war-panic, scuttling to safety, but it was unthinkable. It couldn't happen; they'd find a way out.

Not that he was one of those optimists, he explained to the troubled Frenchman, who believe that the day of war is over. He couldn't think that, with battleships and Zeppelins swelling the taxes. Not until nations stop preparing for war will war be impossible. And his nation, France, would have trouble with the backward nations—all that was on the cards, but a general war, dreadnaughts encircling England, Zeppelins flying over London and Paris, could you picture it? Interfering with serene living, with dinners at clubs, and pompous presentations! Oh, they'd find a way out.

He went on to his room, in a fever to get the back papers, to glance over them before having lunch, when he would again see Isabel.

It was an unreal day, that first one in New York. With Isabel; reading the war-threats; talking with the little Frenchman, reading through the month file sent to his rooms; and seeing Isabel again. Then walking around the neighbourhood to get an impression of New York people, and back again to the hospital. After that, riding down the Avenue on the top deck of a 'bus, thinking of London as he rode, comparing this ribbon of a city with London's great encroaching map. On to Isabel's hospital again, and that time getting a wan smile from her, and then back to the Pilgrim's Hotel where he met the little Frenchman by appointment made earlier in the day. They dined together, talking about Europe, and the Ultimatum.

Miss Paul had said: What ultimatum? when he had asked her what she thought about it, and the office clerks were indifferent. They didn't seem to know what a jolly row it would be if it were not stopped before it began.

Le Page, the Frenchman, knew. 'That was what made his companionship sympathetic. Small wonder a Frenchman was nervous. "Nasty," he confided, "to have that sort of a neighbour, always drilling, getting ready to fight, when all that the French people wanted was a chance to live, and to have the grass grow 'bove their beloved graves. France wasn't rested yet. She wanted the chance to rest, and to forget. She wasn't allowed to do either."

Like a roystering soldier. Germany staying up all the night, her heels on the table, clinking steins and swords, and shouting drinking songs when every one else wanted to be quiet!

"She doesn't want *you*. She wants to get at us," Graeme said towards the end of the evening, when the little Frenchman's gloom had encompassed him, too.

"She'll get at you over us!" retorted the Frenchman.

Then another trip across the street, finding Isabel in a deep sleep. When he got back to his room, Graeme was abashed to remember that he had not asked about the child.

CHAPTER XXXVII

GOING ON

“**I** HAVE to tell you about it, Wade.”

She wanted to tell him about the child; Blood's child. Several times she had started to tell him, but she had been too weak. Each time, she had fallen into piteous weeping.

“Tomorrow, Isabel.”

“I want to get it over, tonight, Wade.”

“Do you think you are strong enough, darling?”

“I won't get strong or better, until I do!”

The regular nurse, Miss Paul, had the afternoon off. She came in, bearing an egg-nog for Isabel. She found numerous things to do in the room that Graeme's observation had found immaculate. She straightened towels, and adjusted shades, smoothing the bedcovers, and giving fresh water to the flowers. Graeme could see Isabel's eyes following her restlessly.

“Will you ring for the hall-nurse, if you need anything,” Miss Paul asked him. “Promise me you will be quiet, Mrs. Sorbier? You know what the doctor said, how much depends on your keeping quiet awhile longer.”

At last, she went out, leaving the door ajar.

“Won't you please close it, Wade?”

Coming back to the bed, he said: “I'm going to read to you, dear. Afterwards you can tell me about it.”

But she did not want to be read to! He couldn't divert her like that.

"Nice, slippery poetry, Isabel?"

She shook her head weakly.

"The newspapers? It looks as though there would be war over yonder, Isabel. Let me read the despatches from London—"

London, Europe appeared to hold no interest for her. Her eyes closed, and he thought he had had his way. She was far too weak yet to talk of painful things. It hurt him to see his vivid, radiant Isabel brought to this. Creeping back to life, very slowly creeping back to life.

He wondered, watching her, if her detachment from the life she had left was the result of her weakness, or had she been able, during those lonely, sad months to establish a relationship with this new, young country? Or had she no interest in anything outside her four white walls?

He had gone around New York somewhat. He had seen Fifth Avenue, Riverside Drive, the Bronx, the Ghetto, Hell's Kitchen. He had decided that it was a city one could not get close to in a hurry. London, he told himself, was reserved, but he meant something more than that. London's history is obvious; one gets close to her history, and to her personality, just passing through the city streets. Street had spoken of the way a stranger *realizes* London. One gets close to London, not to her people. One gets close to nothing in New York, unless one's taken in, said Street! One could not drop out of sight in New

York as one does in London. A man would have to stand on the street, and howl, or wear a bathing suit down Broadway to get noticed.

Isabel's voice whispered that she wanted him to sit very close to her. And would he be very patient? If she stopped like that, every few minutes to rest?

And he thought her sleeping! The poor, tired Isabel!

"We have all the time there is, darling! Eternity, it's ours," he told her.

He wished again that she would not try to talk about it. There was plenty of time to talk about it—about the child that was going to make life so hard for them both. She wasn't fit for it! See those two bright spots of colour on her cheeks!

"I was—terribly ill, long before it came. I—didn't want you to know. I didn't want to live—it seemed easier to go then. His child, wouldn't his child pull me back to him? Oh, Wade, what would it seem to be? What would it believe it was?"

All that mattered was that she was getting better. His brave Isabel! He knew what she had been through!

"They say—I talked; all the time—when I was out of my head. Of wanting to keep it from living; of wanting to strangle it! They watched me all the time, some one was always with me. I didn't want it to live. How could I want his child to live?"

The tears falling over his cheeks, too, like children, crying together. Not ashamed of the tears that were falling because of her suffering—

"But God didn't let me. I didn't know—I never even saw it, Wade. Was it wicked that I was glad? That I didn't want it to live?"

He could not speak. He was taking it slowly. The thing he had been dreading, nerving himself for, was not to be required of him. He wasn't to be required to seem to be the father of another man's child, another man's piteous child. There was no child. He could not check the shuddering which gripped him—

Suddenly, he realized that the hand he was holding was like a burning claw. He was terrified to feel the fire in her face—

The hall nurse answered his ring, and sent him away without ceremony. Why hadn't he rung for her before? How long had Mrs. Sorbier been running a temperature like this? He met the house doctor in the hall.

It was the first time he had passed the fifth floor office without concern. He did not have to torment himself into asking to see the child. There was no piteous unwanted life.

The new form of tragedy—born within wedlock but *without* love. Not recognized yet as a sin against childhood, robbing it of that priceless heritage. But it's getting to be recognized. That was what had brought such suffering to his Isabel, suffering all alone, in a strange land.

Outside somewhere, a barrel organ was playing. He could hear it, a thread of sound, as he walked down the steps, forgetting until he reached the ground floor that there was a lift. As he opened the door, there was a burst of wild music. One of those orches-

tral things, on the next square. With a swift sickening rush, it brought back Bird Place, the tune the fellow was grinding out. He saw his room, Alma's. With Isabel a few feet away in another man's keeping. He could smell London, the fog,—he could see himself going into the wrong house, dazzled by her roses, the firelight glow, her soft beauty. Old songs, old familiar tunes the fellow was playing—

“The music's not immortal but the world has made it sweet, and enriched it with the sunset's glow.”

They were going to live it, the poetry, and the music, Isabel, himself. They were going on, someway bravely—sometime bravely. With Isabel he would find the way, how they could go on, and up, together!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A PLEDGE

HE was sitting between open door and open window, weeks later, to intercept the draft from the electric fans whirring in the tiled halls of the hospital. He could see the river reflecting the heat. It looked like boiling oil. Upon his ear fell the rumble of the 'busses passing up and down the avenue. It made one drowsy, listening to the endless parade of 'busses. No wonder that Isabel now slept the hours away.

Down yonder, the lucky people were riding in automobiles, the others in 'busses, both hunting a fictitious draft. The altogether luckless ones were hanging out of their tenement windows with the bedding and the drying wash. From the Elevated he had seen them, hanging out of the windows, the unkempt, dishevelled women who were trying to breathe, finding comfort by complaining of their discomfort to their neighbours, themselves hanging out of their windows with the bedding and the drying wash. He had seen the children huddling on the red hot pavements, lying across the steps; superfluous children, some of them, with hanging jaws, and dull, vacant eyes; and the undernourished kind.

If not suffering, one could enjoy the peace of this place, with its drawn shades, and whirring electric fans.

It's the *business* of such an establishment, creating comfort and consolations for the poor bodies who are carried here.

He heard the sound of ice clinking in pitchers which were being carried through the halls by the soft-footed nurses. Capable, reserved women, all of those he had seen. They have to be. They don't prattle, these women don't. They know silence is important, every case hiding its sad or happy secret. An air of dignity their responsibility gives them. One can see experience in their faces. It would be interesting to find out what they make of it all; not judgment, he felt sure, but understanding. For every day they see consequences meted out. The consequences of sin is death,—but what is sin? Anything that swings off the hinges of custom.

The papers that morning were screaming about the bodies of a man and a woman found in the park, not ten squares from Isabel's hospital. There were letters found telling of a suicide pact. They couldn't live and obey the rules custom told them to follow, so they went on somewhere else. Suttee again! They might have run away somewhere, they might have found a country or a town where divorce laws would meet their predicament. They could have given up their families, and the liking of their friends, could have hidden under a lying name,—he wondered what it was that hindered them, was it the belief that their love was sin, or was it Opinion they were afraid of, or of a lifetime of lying?

He had asked those questions of their calm, white faces an hour or so ago, as they lay in the morgue

waiting for their friends to discover them. He wanted to see what they would look like, a man and woman who would choose that way of answering law. Death was perhaps lending them a majesty that had not been theirs in life. Perhaps one of them was a coward—

Didn't those magnificent creatures know that the world might be needing them soon, needing *him* right now, a straight-chested fellow like that who was not afraid of death! Didn't they know there was a harder martyrdom waiting for them if it were courage they were wanting to prove? Or thinking only of their own little personal lives? Didn't they guess that it can't be a sin before the eternal if one is exonerated in Nevada for what one would be jailed for in London? Could it be that their pitiful little obscure death hoped for one instant's heeding of an unsystematic world? A world that punishes its victims for its own lack of system! With not more than a dozen stupid faces staring that morning at the slabs on which they lay; with the newspapers giving them a column that evening, the "lead" not why they died, but how—even New York had shuddered—and tomorrow the world will not know that greater love hath no man than this!

In the cool, tiled corridors, ice was clinking in the plated pitchers; everybody praying for ice this hot August afternoon. Those poor fellows over yonder, the ones who are making barriers of their bodies, would welcome ice pitchers about now! Dying like moths over there, and he, an Englishman, hiding in New York—

Just as though you were walking across a road, and a stick you didn't see in time hits you between the eyes! For awhile, you don't think clearly. You know it was a nasty hurt, and that's all, for a bit. Being an Englishman, it hurts—

Stung yesterday, too, in Street's office. Street had been speaking of his own country. Her business it was, he said, to be the world's safety zone. America was to point the Purpose, as yet inchoate, of the war. Her destiny he maintained it was to prove that civilization could not allow two codes, one for the nations, another for the individuals which make up the nations.

Maybe so, he had agreed. It was a big plan. But he was an Englishman, and Englishmen have no choice, have they? They've got to make barriers of their bodies, without bothering about the purpose. And Street had flung it at him: "When are you going back?"

Why was it that he was always feeling shackled? Was it some weakness in himself? Branded a coward as well as a liar by Street. Anger had made him tell Street that it was to be trail-blazing for himself and Isabel; there was to be no hiding behind borrowed names, no life of lying, once she was well.

Street had taken it coolly. "Be successful, then it won't matter what you once *did*. If you can't respect the way the world wants you to live, make it respect the way you live it."

Fackenthal had said the opposite: "If you're successful then the story's bound to be always cropping up against you."

But when are *you* going back?

A weak little voice was trying to make itself noticed. Isabel's eyes were watching him soberly.

"When does the next boat to England leave?"

"The next—boat?"

"I'm thinking the same thoughts, Wade!"

Perhaps she was. She had a trick of thinking the same thoughts, at the same time.

"Will you sit closer so you can hear me? Hold my hand, Wade. It came to me this morning. Did they tell you I sat up for a few minutes this morning? That's the reason I slept so long this afternoon. I've lost so much of your precious visit, Wade!"

Starting to tell her that it wasn't precious, that all the rest of his life was to be with her, but something in her eyes, in her mind, making the words sound trivial and untrue. Just sitting there holding her hand, and watching the sweet frail face, and the eyes that looked so large and wistful.

"I'm not suffering any more. I've passed that. I am going to sit up again tomorrow, and longer the next day. I have a clean bed, comforts, everything I want, thanks to you, Wade! And—"

He waited for her next words, but he knew what they were going to be.

"And over there, in those trenches, just suffering, no—"

"No ice-pitchers!" He wanted to bring a smile into the wan eyes.

"I don't need—anything. I don't need—even—you, Wade!"

Turning away from her then, to blink at the river. Pretending to be seeing the river, to be listening to the rumble of 'busses, but thinking thoughts that felt like a prayer, thoughts that were pulling one down to one's knees!

"The war changed everything for us, dear, didn't it? The day before, we had our right to be happy."

"And now?"

"Just what we can do to help."

Wasn't that—Life? Youth with the right to be happy, and age asking: What can I do to help?

"If I had died, had left you, you would be on your way now to England."

"Why yes. There isn't anything to keep me here but you. Work here, work there, too. But you are living, thank God for that, and you are going to need me, Isabel, a while longer—"

"If I keep you from doing what you would do if I were not here, then I'd be standing in your way, slavery business, again, Wade!"

He confessed the truth then to her. He ought to be helping England pull herself out of her golfholes. He should be helping her brace herself against that sea of grey Prussians which had overwhelmed France and Belgium. But he couldn't leave her yet. They would talk of it again when she was stronger.

"I've a plan," she crooned, whispering, for the effort to talk was taxing her.

He moved closer, sitting on the edge of the narrow white bed.

"I'm going to stay in this hospital. Or come back

to it, if I'm long getting strong. But it can't be long, now that I'm starting, Wade! I'll use your money shamelessly, what you can spare. But I won't need much, studying to be a nurse. And when I can go home, I can help England, too, or France. Wouldn't it be queer, if we met there, in Paris, after all!"

That idea had never occurred to him. Isabel nursing. Isabel in a nurse's cap and uniform, looking like an angel of mercy.

She closed her eyes, and he thought she had fallen asleep again. He sat, holding her hand, and looking down on the sweet face he worshipped.

Love giving him his *freedom*. Not claiming him,—no bondage. Giving him freedom because¹ it *is* love. Because she wants him to stand straight, be the man he wants to be, the man she loved, to be true to himself, first.

Chaotic, unrelated thoughts came rushing in upon his mind as he sat there, looking at her through a mist. Isabel nursing; Isabel at Wade House; Isabel and Fackenthal watching the early crocuses together; Isabel coming in to meet him through the long glass doors from the lawn, into the room where another sweet woman used to wait for him—

Telling him about the flowers she had planted since he had been there, the books she had read, and how she had been changing his room, the room he used to have as a boy, where he used to dream of life, and love, of adventure, of Janice—

For he wasn't going to get too snug and selfish in a nest. He was going to have a place in London,

decent, but not too fine for fellows like Korniloff and his crowd to enjoy coming there. Since that moment on the lonely deck, life had had a different value. It was as though he had died, and had come back to live the margin lent to him. With Isabel helping him, he was going to live the rest differently.

Somewhere he had read that if to a man has come the full shock of realization of death,—of life,—the rest of his days are set to another key, his body the same, but his soul free. Isabel was going to help him keep his soul free.

Going down to spend week-ends, wonderful week-ends with Isabel at Wade House! Carrying Fackenthal, and once in a while Jepson, and Korniloff and his Marie Lezynsky. Sometimes alone, the best times alone. And Isabel, coming up to visit him, in London, the way Mrs. Street visits Street in New York.

He owed the plan to Street.

He had been wanting to see the Street home. New Jersey, it was, Street had told him, where Mrs. Street ran some business in the efficient American way. There were two children. He had been shown their pictures.

The day before, in the American's office, he had urged him to dine with him. Street couldn't accept. His wife had invited him to take dinner at the Holland House where she was stopping, and to go to a show afterwards. Looked at his watch a dozen times, for fear he might be late. They don't let the strangeness, the joy, wear off; they guard the charm.

"I don't know where you are now," a weak voice complained. "You've run away and left me."

"I'm thinking of a poem, a girl and a poem, Isabel."

"Which poem?" She was trying to have him believe she was smiling!

He buried his face in her soft hair. For he had seen tears filling the eyes he loved. If he saw her crying, his Isabel crying, he could never leave her.

Leave her? One doesn't leave Isabel! Wouldn't she always be with him, wherever he was? Would he not always meet her bright spirit, the way they belonged to each other, understanding, seeing each other, where they always found one another?

"You haven't come back yet," she whispered in his ear.

"I'm coming back," he answered. "One way or another, I will always come back to you."

"One way or another," repeated Isabel, slowly, "I will come back to you!" To his ears, it sounded like a pledge, a marriage vow, all that life and custom would grant them, their scrap of ritual.

She asked him again when the next boat sailed, and he heard her stifle a gasp when he replied: "Tomorrow." He knew, he explained to her, because a friend of his was going, the little Frenchman he had told her of.

"I shall wait until you are about again," he told her.

"Wade, it will be harder then. It's going to get harder!"

He leaned over and kissed the thin little fingers.

"When it's over, and I come back, Isabel, wherever it's to be, Wade House, England, Paris, or America, it won't be hiding?"

Oh, no, it wouldn't be hiding!

"Nor lying. So tongues will be cruel— You will suffer—"

She shook her head, wanly smiling, the ghost of Isabel's old smile. It would not make her suffer, that *kind* of suffering!

"For ourselves, we can decide," he persisted. "But not for others. There can never be any children of ours, while he lives, children to suffer, to lie to—"

She knew that, too! Her upward gaze clinging to his face told him that they could decide for themselves, but not for others. She had known that a long, long time!

"A few real friends, the ones who understand, Fackenthal, Jepson, and maybe after awhile others. Will it be enough, Isabel?"

He looked deep into the heart of her truthful eyes for his answer.

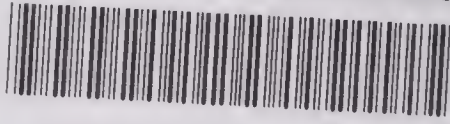
"Before the world, dear?"

And slowly, as though in a church, she answered him:

"Before the world, dear!"

THE END

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